# PRACTICE LEADS TO THEORY: ORTHODOXY AND THE SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE IN THE WORLD OF PHILOXENOS OF MABBUG (470-523)

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it retrieves from obscurity Philoxenos of Mabbug, an influential figure in the religious politics of late antiquity whose place in the historiography has been eclipsed by his "heretical" status as a so-called "monophysite." Secondly, and more importantly, this study uses Philoxenos' career to shed light on one of the most prominent but opaque moments of religious and political conflict in the late antique Mediterranean, the labyrinthine controversies over Christological orthodoxy. These disagreements over doctrines about Christ served as flashpoints in disputes between emperors, usurpers, bishops, monks, and laity for more than two centuries (c. 300-550 and beyond). While past treatments of these theological controversies have focused on the intellectual clash of the debate, this study explores ascetic, devotional, liturgical, and other contexts of praxis which gave the Christological arguments volatility and resonance. In particular, this work examines a half-century of controversy (c. 470-523) through a contextual study of Philoxenos' life and work. It argues that a landscape of collective practice as well as opposing approaches to religious knowledge shaped his concerns over Christology and provided the firepower for his polemics. His involvement in these controversies played out within arenas such as the contingencies of episcopal administration, monastic contemplative practices, habits of scripture reading, liturgical rites including the Eucharist and baptism, and the routinized spiritual combat of the ascetic life. These shared activities of Christian praxis provided a context within which doctrinal disagreements emerged and took on meaning. Knowledge of God was a matter of both practice and theory. In sum, the definition of Christian orthodoxy was shaped by competing visions of Christian orthopraxy.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, without whom it could not have happened.

Foremost, it is dedicated to my Bethany who without words has taught me much about love, life, and truth:

هم حله مدحمه وهند حف حسلم هند مله ماهده. له کن هکهمه وهند اله نکوی اله به بازی ما محدد که شه بازی ما عنزیم له بازی ما عنزیم له کوی ما عنزیم له بازی ما

"Did our Lord limit His whole teaching to so few statements out of ignorance of words? For it is not, O misguided one, the multiplicity of words which draws the truth to itself, but truth epitomizes in itself a multitude of words."

This work is also dedicated to my Simeon, Joel, and Anna who have made life a joy beyond all words.

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books. And Bethany was simply her ever-encouraging self, believing that I would finish sooner rather than later and always knowing me better than I know myself. Thank you!

# **ABBREVIATIONS**

BL British Library

CAH Cambridge Ancient History

CSCO Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium

NA27 Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece Editio 27

NPNF Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

OCA Orientalia Christiana Analecta

PG Migne, Patrologia Graeca

PO Patrologia Orientalis

SC Sources Chrétiennes

TLG Thesaurus Linguae Graecae

TTH Translated Texts for Historians

Vat. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana

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#### INTRODUCTION

Adoption of Christian practice and belief has generally been seen as one of the unifying factors in the cultural fabric of the Late Roman Empire. While this observation is useful at a macro-level for understanding the transformation of the classical world into its progeny in Byzantium, the Islamic world, and the medieval West, it must be tempered by recalling the vast diversity of late antique Christianity. In fact the very events which have traditionally been held as markers of unity, the various ecumenical councils which occurred between the Council of Nicaea (325) and the Council of Chalcedon (451), did little to abate the intense intra-Christian disputes of the era. Despite imperial and ecclesiastical intentions to the contrary, the Council of Chalcedon proved so divisive that within a century, separate and permanent Church hierarchies had formed based on acceptance or rejection of Chalcedonian theology.<sup>2</sup>

The central point in dispute at Chalcedon was as simple as the difference between "one" and "two." Specifically, the question was in what manner Christ was to be considered both human and divine—did he have one nature (the miaphysite position, i.e. Christ's nature was at the same time human and divine) or two natures (the dyophysite position, i.e. Christ

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Kurt Aland has eloquently summed up the failure of the Chalcedonian formula this way: "Thus they believed they had solved the problem. In fact, as in the Arian controversy, they had only created a formula. With it they described the unity of God and man in Christ, but the *how* still remained unexplained, just as before, simply because it was inexplicable.... Instead, the controversy about Christology really began to take on its full force after Chalcedon, after the argument had theoretically come to a conclusion." Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, trans. James L. Schaaf, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1:202. While his comment on Chalcedon is insightful, Aland's general interpretation of "monophysitism" is too narrow and doctrinally focused to be of further use here. See Aland, *A History of Christianity*, 2:204.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> These separations have persisted to the present in the division between the Chalcedonian churches (e.g. Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Melkite) and the non-Chalcedonian churches (e.g. Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox).

had separate natures for his humanity and divinity)?<sup>3</sup> As simple as the mathematical logic of this question may seem, the reasons for aligning with one side or another in the debate were complex.

The thesis of this study is that while doctrinal division ("one" versus "two") was the formal cause of disagreement in the post-Chalcedonian controversies, the real driving force of the dispute for some of the participants came from competing visions of Christian practice underlying the doctrinal differences. As we shall see, Christology (theology about Christ) was formulated within contexts of praxis such as the oversight of religious communities, the pursuit of divine knowledge through contemplation and scholarship, the reading of scripture, participation in the liturgical mysteries, and ascetic practices of spiritual combat. Some late antique Christians considered these shared practices to be just as valuable or superior to theology as ways of knowing God. Indeed, theological reflection is perhaps best understood as only one among many intertwined religious practices in late antique Christianity. Theological statements had implications for the interpretation of these other practices, but at the same time appeals to other authoritative forms of praxis (such as the liturgical rites or ascetic discipline) could inform theology. In short, the formation of late antique Christian orthodoxy must be understood in the context of communal orthopraxy.

This nexus of theology and practice can be seen vividly in the world of Philoxenos of Mabbug (c. 440-523), one of the last ecclesiastical and intellectual leaders of the miaphysite

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The preferred usage is now "miaphysite" which is both grammatically correct and not considered a term of opprobrium. The older term "monophysite" should be abandoned as it both misrepresents the views of the one nature party and has its origins as a term of derision. For a further discussion see Lucas Van Rompay, "Mallpânâ dilan Suryâyâ. Ephrem in the Works of Philoxenus of Mabbog: Respect and Distance," *Hugoye* 7, 1 (2004), http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol7No1/HV7N1VanRompay.html.

theological party before the permanent separation over issues of Christology.<sup>4</sup> The chapters that follow examine how contexts ranging from episcopal administration, contemplative practice, habits of scripture reading, participation in liturgical practices, and the spiritual combat of ascesis influenced Philoxenos' theology and his polemics against the dyophysite doctrines of his opponents.

#### PHILOXENOS: LIFE AND WORKS

From his birth in Persia to his exile and death in Thrace, Philoxenos' life spanned remarkably varied geographic, political, and religious environments. Strategically positioned in his bishopric on the Euphrates, Philoxenos took on theological opponents in both Persia and Antioch and was willing to travel to Constantinople as needed. Given the differing settings and levels of success which met Philoxenos' polemical endeavors, a brief outline of his biography is in order. This task is greatly facilitated by the work of André de Halleux to which the reader is referred for more detail.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The existing secondary literature on Philoxenos is limited but useful. Specifically, there are five monographs of note. Four are theologically or philosophically oriented: Joseph Lebon, Le Monophysisme sévérien: Étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au Concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'Église jacobite (Louvain: Josephus Van Linthout, 1909); Roberta C. Chesnut, Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Guy Lardreau, Discours philosophique et discours spirituel: autour de la philosophie spirituelle de Philoxène de Mabbong (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985); Jad Hatem, La Gloire de l'un: Philoxène de Mabbong et Laurent de la résurrection (Paris: Harmattan, 2003). The fifth study is broader and more historically oriented: André de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, ses écrits, sa theologie (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1963). The present study is designed to complement de Halleux's work, which has done much of the requisite chronological, codicological, and textual work needed for a cultural and historical study of Philoxenos.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 3-105.

# ORIGINS (MID-FIFTH CENTURY)

Little is known about Philoxenos' origins. He was born in the mid-fifth century in the Persian region of Beth Garmai (the Tigris river valley). Eventually either he or his family settled in Roman Mesopotamia, and at an undetermined date Philoxenos was educated at the School of the Persians in Edessa. Later allegations against Philoxenos indicate that this education was dyophysite. At some point, however, Philoxenos came to side with the miaphysite Christology. Little else is known from this early period. De Halleux has convincingly argued that later medieval traditions which claim that Philoxenos sojourned in various monasteries in this period are not reliable. Nevertheless, Philoxenos' training at the School of the Persians would have involved exposure to asceticism in Edessa and classic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> There are a few medieval hagriographies of Philoxenos. The most notable is a thirteenth-century vita: Eli of Qartamin, *Memra on Mar Philoxenos*, published as *Memra sur S. Mar Philoxène de Mabbog Texte*, ed. André de Halleux, CSCO 233 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963). Eli's vita was adapted in a later anonymous life translated by Alphonse Mingana and edited by Sebastian Brock. *History of Mar Philoxenos*, published as "*New Documents on Philoxenus of Heirapolis and the Philoxenian Version of the Bible*," trans. Alphonse Mingana, *The Expositor* 19, 110 (1920); *History of Mar Philoxenos*, published as "*Tash`ita d-Mar Aksenaya*," ed. Sebastian Brock, *Qolo Suryoyo* 110 (1996). Biographical details on Philoxenos as well as an analysis of the reliability of the various ancient sources can be found in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 3-17. A review of further manuscripts by Vööbus should be used with care. Arthur Vööbus, "La Biographie de Philoxène: Tradition des manuscrits," *Annalecta Bollandiana* 93 (1975): 187-193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See the discussion of the School of the Persians below in chapter one. See also Simeon of Beth Arsham, *Epistola Simeonis Beth-Arsamensis de Barsauma episcopo Nisibeno, deque haeresi Nestorianorum*, in *Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, ed. and trans. Giuseppe Simone Assemani (Romae: Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719), 353.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See the comment on this by Habib: Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (IX-X)*, published as *Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib)*, ed. and trans. M. Brière and F. Graffin, PO 40.2 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1980), 344, 10\(\circ{1}{8}186-187.\)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 2. Andrew Palmer is similarly inclined, but does suggest that there were relations between Philoxenos and Tur Abdin monasteries later in Philoxenos' career. Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur Abdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113-116.

texts of monasticism such as the works of Evagrius.<sup>10</sup> Given the paucity of comments from Philoxenos about this early dyophysite period, little more can be said. Moreover, no works from this early period survive or have been identified.

# EARLY POLEMICAL ENGAGEMENT (470s TO 484)

More details are available for the next period in Philoxenos' life. In the 470s, Philoxenos came to Antioch to join the growing circle of miaphysites under the Patriarch Peter the Fuller (either in 470-471 or 475-476). At this point, he became involved in the dispute over Peter's miaphysite addition to the *Trisagion* hymn. These were tumultuous years for the miaphysites. While in Antioch, Philoxenos would have experienced rapid shifts in ecclesiastical and imperial authority. In 475-476, the Emperor Zeno was challenged by a usurper, Basiliscus. To gain support in Antioch and Alexandria, Basiliscus (who had seized power in Constantinople) condemned Chalcedon. Peter the Fuller then endorsed Basiliscus. In retribution, after Zeno had defeated Basiliscus, he also removed Peter from the Antiochene Patriarchate. It appears that Philoxenos remained in the vicinity of Antioch in this period. It is also likely that he began to compose polemical letters to continue the debate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Adam Becker has rightly cautioned, however, against making overly specific claims about the School of the Persians given the problems with the sources. Adam H. Becker, Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 41-43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See the discussion of this controversy in chapter one.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> For a general history of the Antiochene Patriarchate see the data assembled in Robert Devreesse, *Le Patriarcat d'Antioche, depuis la paix de l'église jusqu'à la conquête arabe* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1945).

which Peter had begun over the *Trisagion*. His *Letter to the Monks on Faith* was written for this purpose circa 482.<sup>14</sup>

The year 482 brought yet another disruption. Tensions between the competing miaphysite and Chalcedonian claims to the Patriarchal throne in Antioch had heated up with the murder of the Chalcedonian Patriarch Stephen II in 479.<sup>15</sup> In 482, the Emperor Zeno issued the *Henoticon*—a restraining order on theological debate which he hoped would end the controversy. Nevertheless in Antioch, the new Chalcedonian Patriarch Calendion was taking a hard line against miaphysites and expelled Philoxenos from the city. Philoxenos was quite prolific during this exile (482-484) as he traveled from monastery to monastery rallying support.<sup>16</sup> In particular, he traveled to Constantinople in 484 to lobby the Emperor Zeno for the deposition of Calendion. A profession of faith made to Zeno by Philoxenos survives from this audience.<sup>17</sup> Other works from this period include several letters to various monasteries (Beth Gogol and Teleda among others).<sup>18</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Philoxenos

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks on Faith, in Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485-519): Being the Letter to the Monks, the First Letter to the Monks of Beth-Gaugal, and the Letter to Emperor Zeno, ed. and trans. Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde (Roma: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1902), 93-105, 127-45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Alois Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition: Volume Two: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604), trans. Pauline Allen and John Cawte (London: Mowbray, 1987), 250.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Emperor Zeno, in Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485-519): Being the Letter to the Monks, the First Letter to the Monks of Beth-Gaugal, and the Letter to Emperor Zeno, ed. and trans. Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde (Roma: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1902), 118-26, 163-73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, First Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol, in Three Letters of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbogh (485-519): Being the Letter to the Monks, the First Letter to the Monks of Beth-Gaugal, and the Letter to Emperor Zeno, ed. and trans. Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde (Roma: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1902), 105-118, 146-162; Philoxenos of Mabbug, First Letter to the Monks of Teleda, published as La lettera di Filosseno: Ai monaci di Tell'adda (Teleda): Memoria del socio Ignazio Guidi, ed. and trans. Ignazio Guidi (Roma: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1886).

wrote his first extended piece of polemic in this period (482-484), the *Phenqitho against Habib*. This *Phenqitho* (dossier) eventually came to contain an initial letter by Philoxenos, excerpts from a rebuttal by a dyophysite monk named Habib, two responses by Philoxenos (one short and the other consisting of 10 treatises), and a lengthy florilegium of Christological citations from earlier authors.<sup>19</sup>

# EARLY EPISCOPAL ADMINISTRATION (485-498)

In 484, Philoxenos' fortunes changed again. His enemy, Calendion, had sided with the pro-Chalcedonian usurpers Leontius and Illus. When Zeno regained control of Antioch in 484, Calendion was deposed and Peter the Fuller restored yet again to the patriarchal throne. In addition to Calendion, Zeno deposed nine other bishops through out the diocese of the *Oriens*. Thus in 485, Peter the Fuller chose Philoxenos to fill one of these sees as the metropolitan bishop of Mabbug (ancient Hierapolis), a see which he would hold until 519.<sup>20</sup>

As he settled into his new episcopal duties in Mabbug (capital of the eastern border province of Euphratensis), Philoxenos had time to devote to writing. In the period from 485-498, Philoxenos most likely wrote his most elaborate Christological treatise, the lengthy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> This was published in several parts: Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (I-II), published as Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib), ed. and trans. Maurice Brière, PO 15 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1920); Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (III-V), published as Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib), eds. and trans. M. Brière and F. Graffin, PO 38.3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1977); Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (VI-VIII), published as Sancti Philoxeni episcopi Mabbugensis dissertationes decem de uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo (Memre contre Habib), ed. and trans. M. Brière and F. Graffin, PO 39.4 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1979); Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (IX-X).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> See the summary of this in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 38-39.

Book of Sentences, and also his most developed ascetic writings, the Discourses.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these works, Philoxenos gave his attention to cultivating the Christian community under his pastoral care. Hierapolis was still the cult center for the worship of the Syrian goddess Attargatis. Although evidence is limited, it appears that Philoxenos contributed to the increasing Christianization of the city. He also established several new monastic communities. While most were small (five to ten monks), these new establishments did include the large monastery at Senun which Philoxenos spoke proudly of at the end of his life.<sup>22</sup>

In this same period, Philoxenos continued his efforts to oppose the Council of Chalcedon under the banner of the *Henoticon* which had been maintained by Zeno's successor, the Emperor Anastasius (r. 491-518). While Anastasius' ecclesiastical politics were not overtly pro-miaphysite, he did facilitate the expansion of miaphysites in Syria. Judging from the fact that Mabbug quickly reverted back to Chalcedonian orthodoxy after Philoxenos' tenure, it seems that Philoxenos was not particularly successful in converting his city to a miaphysite theology.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, he held his bishopric for more than three

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *The Book of Sentences*, published as *Tractatus tres de trinitate et incarnatione (textus)*, ed. Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde, CSCO 9 (Lovanii: Peeters, 1907); Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses*, in *The Discourses of Philoxenus*, *Bishop of Mabbôgh, A.D. 485-519*, ed. and trans. E.A. Wallis Budge (London: Asher & Co., 1894).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> The location of Senun is unknown, but from references in Philoxenos' letter it appears to be somewhere between Mabbug and Edessa. On a discussion of Philoxenos' claims to have Christianized Mabbug, see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 42-45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Philoxenos' predecessors on the episcopal throne of Mabbug had been committed dyophysites for several generations (back to the time of Alexander of Mabbug, who had refused to compromise with Cyril at Ephesus in 431). De Halleux is perhaps too optimistic about what Philoxenos achieved in Mabbug, nevertheless he is right to point out that Philoxenos was successful in Syria if not in his own city. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 46.

decades and used its influence and authority to bolster the miaphysite cause through out the Roman East and beyond. From Mabbug, he kept alert to the spread of dyophysite theology in Persia and was perhaps involved in the closure of the School of the Persians in 489. Of even greater strategic importance were his ordinations. The Miaphysite missionary Simeon of Beth Arsham reported that Philoxenos had ordained the first two bishops of Najran on the Arabian Peninsula, including the martyr-bishop Paul II.<sup>24</sup> More significantly for the Miaphysite ascendancy, it was Philoxenos and his five loyal suffragen bishops of Euphratensis who formed the miaphysite core leadership in the period before Severus' ordination.<sup>25</sup>

# CAMPAIGN AGAINST FLAVIAN OF ANTIOCH (498-512)

Philoxenos' success at ralying the church hierarchy for the miaphysites led him to an even bolder endeavor. In 498, the pro-Chalcedonian Flavian was made patriarch in Antioch. Philoxenos, who had now assumed a senior position among the miaphysite leadership, spent the next 14 years trying to unseat Flavian. His strategy for this endeavor is discussed in the next chapter, but it should be noted here that this period was also one of the most productive for Philoxenos in terms of scholarship and polemic. By this point, he had set up a scriptorium in Mabbug whose crowning achievement was a fresh translation of the New Testament into Syriac completed in 507 or 508. Based on this translation, Philoxenos himself

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Simeon of Beth Arsham, *New Letter*, published as *Simeon's New Letter (G)*, in *The Martyrs of Najrân: New Documents*, ed. and trans. Irfan Shahîd, Subsidia Hagiographica 49 (Bruxelles: Soc. des Bollandistes, 1971), vi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 78.

wrote polemical commentaries on portions of Matthew, Luke, and John.<sup>26</sup> He also continued to write lengthy letters, mainly to monks and monastic communities on both ascetic and doctrinal topics such as his *Letter to Patricius*.<sup>27</sup>

From Philoxenos' correspondence, it can be seen that the struggle in Antioch was not his sole focus. From 502-505, the Roman Empire had been at war with Persia. Mabbug as a garrison town saw substantial troop presences during this period. Philoxenos continued to wage his own theological conflict across the border with attacks on the dyophysite leadership in the Church of the East. Strikingly, sometime during or just after the war, he composed a heresiology against the dyophysites which he sent as a letter to the Lakhmid Phylarch, the main Persian ally along the Roman march. Moreover, after the war was completed, Philoxenos played a role in supporting the work of Simeon of Beth Arsham in Armenia against the dyophysites. Finally, it is likely that Philoxenos had both the conflict with Flavian and the fate of the miaphysites in Persia on his agenda when he undertook an embassy to the Emperor Anastasius in Constantinople in 507.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John, published as Commentaire du prologue johannique (Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14,534), texte, ed. André de Halleux, CSCO 380 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1977); Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke, published as Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke (Text), ed. J. W. Watt, CSCO 392 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1978).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to Patricius (Longer Recension)*, published as *La lettre à Patricius de Philoxène de Mabboug*, ed. and trans. René Lavenant, PO 30.5 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1963).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Greatrex, Rome and Persia at War, 502-532 (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998), 106, 116.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Abu Ya'fur, published as "Lettre de Philoxène de Mabbūg au phylarque Abū Ya'fūr de Hīrtā de Bētna'mān (selon le manuscrit no 115 du fond patriarcat de Šarfet)," ed. and trans. Paul Harb, Melto 3, 1-2 (1967): 183-222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 64.

# LATER EPISCOPAL ADMINISTRATION (512-519)

With the tacit support of Anastasius, Philoxenos' struggle against Flavian led to one of the greatest (and last) victories for the miaphysites of Syria and Anatolia, the consecration of Severus as Patriarch of Antioch in 512. This victory came after failed attempts to force out Flavian at synods in Antioch (509) and Sidon (511). Chapter one will consider the challenges of this period in detail. It suffices here to note that Philoxenos served as a senior and seasoned advisor to Severus. In particular, Philoxenos and Severus struck a moderate tone as they sought to consolidate and expand the miaphysite control of the churches in Syria and Anatolia. Philoxenos continued to write letters advising both Severus and various monasteries in this period, such as his *Letter to the Lector Maron of Anazarbus* and his *Letter to Abraham and Orestes*.<sup>31</sup>

# EXILE (519-523)

The miaphysite ascendancy, which culminated in Severus' ordination, was short lived. In 518, Justin I succeeded Anastasius as Emperor and declared himself in favor of the Chalcedonians and the Christology of the church in Rome. Severus, Philoxenos, and most of the miaphysite hierarchy in Syria and Anatolia were driven into exile in Thrace. Nevertheless, even in these final four years of his life, Philoxenos continued what had been one of his main polemical activities, writing letters to monks encouraging them to fight for the miaphysite Christology. Such exhortation can be found in all three of his surviving exilic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Lector Maron of Anazarbus, published as "Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug," ed. and trans. J. Lebon, Le Muséon 43, 1-2 (1930): 17-84; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Abraham and Orestes, published as Letter of Mar Xenaias of Mabûg to Abraham and Orestes, Presbyters of Edessa, Concerning Stephen Bar Sudaili the Edessene, in Stephen Bar Sudaili the Syrian Mystic and the Book of the Hierotheos, ed. and trans. A.L. Frothingham, Jr. (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1886), 44.

letters: the Letter to the Monks of Senun, which included another patristic florilegium; his Letter to Simeon of Teleda; and his Letter to the Monks of the Orient.<sup>32</sup>

Philoxenos died in 523 under house arrest in exile. While later reports that he was murdered are difficult to substantiate, it is likely that the stress of deportation combined with his old age was the cause. Due to his prolific writings and successful leadership of the Syriac-speaking miaphysites, Philoxenos' reputation continued to grow after his death. Numerous sixth and seventh century manuscripts survive with portions of his works. Indeed due to the changing circumstance of preservation in the period, the early manuscript evidence for Philoxenos' works is unprecedented compared to earlier late antique authors or even to his Latin and Greek contemporaries.

#### **PERIODIZATION**

As we return to consider various aspects of Philoxenos' career in the chapters that follow, it will be useful to keep in mind these five periods: his early polemical engagement (470s to 484), his early episcopal administration (485-498), his leadership in the struggle against Flavian of Antioch (498-512), his later episcopal administration under the

<sup>32</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of Senun, published as Lettre aux moines de Senoun (texte), ed. André de Halleux, CSCO 231 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963); Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of the Orient (Part I), published as "Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug," ed. and trans. J. Lebon, Le Muséon 43, 1-2 (1930): 57, 83-84; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of the Orient (Part II), published as "Nouveaux textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug: II. Lettre aux moines d'orient," ed. and trans. André de Halleux, Le Muséon 76 (1963): 5-26; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Simeon, Abbot of Teleda, published as "Textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabboug," ed. and trans. J. Lebon, Le Muséon 43, 1-2 (1930): 150-220.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, they are preserved primarily in catena rather than in their entirety.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> This is in part due to the separation of the Syrian Orthodox Church shortly after Philoxenos' death. See the list of manuscript evidence in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 517-520.

Patriarchate of Severus (512-519), and his exile (519-523).<sup>35</sup> Having played the many roles of experienced bishop, proven monastic leader, rigorous theologian, learned exegete, prolific polemicist, and would-be imperial counselor in these periods, Philoxenos' theological agenda was tightly interwoven with his vision of Christian practice and community. Accordingly, his diverse ecclesiastical career and writings provide ample material to contextualize the late antique Christological conflicts.

#### CONTEXTS OF PRAXIS

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how the disputes over Christology were shaped by contexts of praxis. Taking Philoxenos as a profitable and understudied source, the chapters which follow build up a cumulative context for his opposition to the Council of Chalcedon. In particular they examine how Philoxenos understood the Christological disputes in relation to arenas of practice including: the oversight of religious communities, contemplative practices, the reading of scripture, participating in the liturgical mysteries, and ascetic practices of spiritual struggle. Each chapter places Philoxenos' polemics within an increasingly wider circle of context in order to demonstrate how collective practice as well as competing approaches to religious knowledge shaped his concerns over Christology.

# CHAPTER ONE: OIKONOMIA AND ADMINISTRATION

The first arena of practice which we will use to contextualize Philoxenos' involvement in the Christological disputes is that of episcopal administration. While

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> This periodization, as well as much of the preceding survey, is dependant on de Halleux's work. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 3-105.

Philoxenos has attracted scholarly attention for the vehemence and partisan nature of his polemics, few have examined his record as an administrator and strategist. His ardent opposition to heresy notwithstanding, details of his episcopal administration reveal that Philoxenos showed a surprising level of pragmatism in the oversight of his clergy, monks, and laity—many of whom were not supportive of his theology. This first chapter examines how Philoxenos tolerated and even promoted compromises whenever doing so would play into the outworking of what he called the divine "oikonomia."

The term oikonomia (οἰκονομία in Greek, κόαι τος οι κουΐας in Syriac, roughly "economy" in English) was used by Philoxenos to describe both episcopal administration and his vision of God's providential workings for human salvation. In advocating compromise in the name of oikonomia, Philoxenos was appealing to a concept of a higher order beyond the disputes over Christology. In this larger context of God's governance, Philoxenos presented theology as one of a constellation of Christian practices in the divine oikonomia which directed the faithful toward knowledge of God.

Philoxenos' involvement in the Christological controversies cannot be reduced to a single-minded attachment to a particular theological expression. At the same time, however, it is evident from Philoxenos' life and writings that these conflicts over Christological formulae were of paramount importance to him. The remaining chapters of this study use religious praxis to examine how theology as a practice both informed and was itself informed by these other practices, including contemplation, scriptural interpretation, liturgical rites, and ascetic piety. It was to this realm of praxis that Philoxenos appealed when he sought to rally support against his theological opponents. In his holistic vision of *oikonomia*, the conflict

between heresy and orthodoxy was but one constituent part of a cosmic scheme of divine and human action. Accordingly, Philoxenos saw his polemics as one facet in this divine *oikonomia*, of which Christ's incarnation was the central act and the many tasks of monk, bishop, and layman each had a part.

# CHAPTER TWO: PRACTICE, CONTEMPLATION, AND DIVINE VISION

Before turning to consider the intersection of doctrine and practice in Philoxenos' polemics (the topics of Chapters Three through Five), we begin with an examination of how he viewed Christian practice. Although Philoxenos was not a monk, he held monasticism in very high regard, developing his own ascetic system and writing the majority of his works for monastic audiences. This chapter contextualizes Philoxenos within a monastic intellectual milieu and identifies some of the dynamics of the monastic network which he drew upon in the Christological controversies.

Specifically, this chapter reveals the tensions that arose from competing visions of the practice of contemplation. Philoxenos faced opposition from monks who saw participation in the doctrinal controversies as incompatible with their monastic goal of stillness and divine contemplation. On the other hand, Philoxenos himself saw theological orthodoxy as a necessary step on the path to contemplating God.

In both cases, Philoxenos and the reluctant monastic disputants were drawing upon a system of ascetic contemplation developed by Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345-399). It was through Evagrius that Philoxenos understood the relationship between practice and knowledge of God. In particular, he followed Evagrius' two-fold system of spiritual

progress. For Evagrius, the monk began with ascetic practice (praktikē/πραπτική) and used it to subdue the passions and demons which troubled his soul. Once a state of stillness had been reached, the monk then turned away from bodily practice to spiritual knowing. The monk then in spiritual contemplation (theōria/θεωρία) until his soul was no longer relying on any physical intermediaries and was directly receiving spiritual knowledge of God in a divine vision.

This Evagrian paradigm of practice and theory was foundational to Philoxenos' own epistemology with regard to divine knowledge. As we shall see, both Evagrius and Philoxenos had little use for doctrinal reflection at either stage of the path to divine knowledge. In the first stage, *praktikē*, the monk had not yet purified himself from passion and as such was not worthy to discuss doctrine until he has mastered the monastic life. In the second stage, *theōria*, the monk could contemplate on scripture and doctrine (such as the concept of the Trinity), but ultimately his goal was to move beyond the use of words (hence beyond theology in the doctrinal sense) to an ineffable knowledge of God, theology which in the Evagrian sense was a wordless and imageless form of prayer. Interestingly, both steps, *praktikē* and *theōria*, were forms of religious practice done according to a set method which did not encourage doctrinal speculation.

As will become apparent in Chapters Three through Five, Evagrian understandings of practice and knowledge offered an anchor for Philoxenos' polemics. Against the theological speculations of his opponents, Philoxenos argued that correct practices would lead directly to theory (spiritual knowledge through contemplation) culminating in infinite and ineffable knowledge of the divine.

### CHAPTER THREE: READING SCRIPTURE

In the last three chapters, we turn to specific contexts of praxis for Philoxenos' Christological polemics. The first is the communal practice of reading and interpreting scripture. Philoxenos invested considerable energy in the issue of scriptural interpretation. His scriptorium in Mabbug undertook to retranslate the New Testament into Syriac to rectify certain passages of the earlier Syriac translation (the *Peshitta*) which Philoxenos felt the earlier translators had left open to misinterpretation. Moreover, he also wrote his own Biblical commentaries in part to counter the authority which the dyophysite commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia enjoyed.

In these commentaries, Philoxenos did not merely offer alternative proof texts to support his miaphysite Christology; his disagreement with Theodore went deeper. The miaphysite and dyophysite approaches to scripture reflected conflicting ways of knowing God. Philoxenos objected that in their speculative method of interpretation, the dyophysites impeded the process of simple faith through which scripture would deliver the mysteries of the incarnation to the believer. His commentaries instructed the readers to eschew speculation. For Philoxenos (following Evagrius), scripture was an aid to contemplation and divine knowledge and as such was to be read in a simple or straightforward manner. Philoxenos was keen to remind those under his care, that knowledge of divine things was not acquired "by research, nor discussion, nor probing, nor by controversy." 36

<sup>36 .</sup> הביד היים הכלה הביד היים הביד היים באה.. ביד Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 187.

In short, while Philoxenos' disagreement with the dyophysite commentators focused on interpreting Christological passages, that was only a surface point of conflict. At its core, the disagreement was a deeper one about the correct way to gain knowledge of God from scripture. And since for Philoxenos such divine knowledge was ultimately ineffable, commentary and explanation, as such, were inappropriate. Accordingly, we may interpret his efforts to rebuff dyophysite commentary as an extension of his endeavor to promote the wordless Evagrian contemplation of the divine.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: LITURGICAL PRACTICE

For a second context of praxis, we move from the practices of reading to the ritual mysteries of baptism and the Eucharist. As in his polemics against dyophysite commentary, Philoxenos was concerned with access to the divine in his polemical appeal to the liturgy. Specifically, Philoxenos had three related concerns about dyophysite Christology vis-à-vis the liturgy.

In the first place he continued his attack against theological investigation, per se, as incompatible with right worship. Following the position of Ephrem against the Arians, Philoxenos maintained that Christ and the incarnation should be adored in silence not subjected to theological speculation. In this regard, he was being true to the Evagrian system of contemplation where knowledge of the divine and even the divine presence was received passively and directly. For Philoxenos, a similar function occurred in the Eucharist and baptism where the faithful had direct access to the divine.

Philoxenos saw this access as threatened, however, by theological error. His second liturgical objection to the dyophysite Christology was that in setting an impenetrable

boundary between God and humanity, the dyophysites ended up denying the central mysteries of the liturgy, thereby cutting off human access to the divine. Philoxenos maintained that if Christ's humanity and divinity were separate (as the dyophysites claimed), then Christ's divinity could not be present in the Eucharist. Moreover, Philoxenos also argued that if humanity and divinity remained separate in Christ, then human aspirations to divinization through baptism could not be realized. In short, for Philoxenos, the implications of the dyophysite theology contravened the logic of the liturgy and the symmetry of the incarnation.

This led him to a final, grave charge. Philoxenos maintained that in disrupting the bridge between humanity and the divine in the mysteries, dyophysite theology hindered the work of the Holy Spirit both in Christ's incarnation and in its indwelling in each believer. This sin against the Holy Spirit was grievous and subject to the strongest of Philoxenos' polemical attacks.

#### CHAPTER FIVE: ASCETISICM AND SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:12-18, 316.

Such an appeal couched in monastic vocabulary was more than a pragmatic attempt to rally monastic centers. A detailed examination of Philoxenos' main Christological arguments reveals that his response to dyophysite theology was largely drawn from the concepts of his ascetic system (i.e. the Evagrian concepts discussed in chapter one). In particular, three aspects of Philoxenos' anti-dyophysite polemics stand out as being taken from his ascetic schema: his dogmatic approach to doctrine, his rejection of human knowledge in favor of a hermeneutic of simplicity, and his model of spiritual combat. All three of these themes are readily apparent in Philoxenos' ascetic magnum opus, the Discourses.

In the context of the *Discourses*, however, these concepts were applied not to doctrinal controversy but to the internal spiritual battle undertaken in pursuit of the discipleship of Christ. In this light, Philoxenos' polemic can be understood as a constituent part of a larger mystical enterprise. Contention over Christology was only one aspect, albeit a pressing one, of a larger spiritual endeavor of the discipleship of Christ.

In sum, for Philoxenos, there were concerns beyond "right doctrine" which motivated the disciple to eschew the supposed error and craftiness of the heretics. He held that heresy stood in the way of the life of perfection which is the ultimate goal of Christ's disciples. Thus for Philoxenos, attaining and keeping the true faith were integral and essential parts of the path to perfection.

#### CONCLUSION

Generalizing from the contexts under consideration (the pragmatic constraints of local communities, the practice of Evagrian contemplation, reading scripture, liturgical action, and monastic life), this study argues that for Philoxenos, the late antique doctrinal

controversies must be understood within a framework of praxis. Particularities of doctrine mattered, but their potency often came from their implications within the world of Christian practice. Philoxenos' objection to dyophysite Christology stemmed from more than just a desire for exactitude in the minutiae of doctrinal terminology. He held pastoral, liturgical, and spiritual duties upon which he considered to be threatened by his opponents' Christology. His response was, therefore, not merely that of a theologian, but that of a bishop. His response was guided by a desire to ensure the proper functioning of the *oikonomia* of salvation. The priorities he placed on the *divine oikonomia* meant that Philoxenos had to be zealous to prevent false teaching from obscuring the *oikonomia* of the incarnation, but also to check zeal for right doctrine when it threatened the ability of the church to perform its part in the *oikonomia* of salvation. In short, Philoxenos rightly earned a reputation as an ardent opponent of heresy, but he did not do so in the service of theological erudition or controversy. In the end, Philoxenos conceived of theological polemics as an ascetic and spiritual stuggle, rather than an intellectual exercise.

# CHAPTER ONE ORDAINING SATAN: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE DIVINE OIKONOMIA

"Since I have left the city [to go into exile], the Lord has extraordinarily enlivened the spirit of the faithful everywhere.... And thus there are found everywhere those who are worthy to confess Christ, but only the city of which I have [just] lost the pastorate has been deprived of this happiness.... Because, as they tell me, certain citizens of my city have gone over to the persecutors rather than to those being persecuted and have joined the side of those who fight against Christ and not the side of those who suffer for him and with him. And, as they tell me, it was above all certain clergy...What tears I shed before the Lord on learning this news!... All of the clergy except one had received ordination from me and I had, myself, enlisted all of the brothers and sisters, and baptized nearly two-thirds of the city, for which I have [now] received as repayment an anathema as a heretic!"<sup>38</sup>

—Letter to the Monks of Senun

Writing from imperial exile in 519, Philoxenos lamented the precipitous end to his nearly five decades of struggle on behalf of the miaphysite cause. In spite of his efforts as a bishop to ordain clergy and establish new monastic communities, his ecclesiastical constituents had swiftly abandoned the miaphysite side when it became impolitic. His bitter words from exile reveal the importance which he attached to the human aspect of the doctrinal conflicts over Christology—success in winning and keeping the allegiance of monastics and the lesser clergy (priests and deacons). In light of his complaint, this chapter

will consider how the necessities of overseeing these ecclesiastical constituents (the middle management of the church) constrained and informed Philoxenos' participation in the Christological controversies.

Our examination of Philoxenos' episcopal administration will proceed in three steps. We begin with a brief survey of the events which set the stage for the period of miaphysite ascendancy under the patriarchate of Severus (512-519). In particular, we will consider the campaign which Philoxenos led against the patriarch Flavian between 498-512. The second step in our investigation is an analysis of two challenges which arose in this time and consumed the attention of both Philoxenos and Severus in their episcopal administrations, particularly in the years from 512-519. These two problems may be summarized as crises of qualification and of allegiance. In the final section of this chapter we turn to consider the solution which Philoxenos and Severus advocated to these challenges. This solution may be summed up by a single technical term which can be translated literally as "economy" but is perhaps best left transliterated as *oikonomia* (οιχονομία in Greek or the synonyms in Syriac

പ്രാഹം and **പ്രാ**ഹം).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> While this chapter is primarily concerned with Philoxenos, the letters of Severus are a rich source for this period. Accordingly, the letters of Severus are used to fill lacunae in the letters of Philoxenos where appropriate. References are primarily taken from the first edition of letters edited by Severus of Antioch, Select Letters, published as The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, in the Syriac Version of Athanasius of Nisibis, ed. and trans. E.W. Brooks (London: Williams and Norgate, 1902). Please note that citations will give the reference to the text rather than Brooks translation. For the scant relevant literature on this topic see Volker Menze, "Priest, Laity and the Sacrament of the Eucharist in Sixth Century Syria," Hugoye 7, 2 (2004), Http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol7No2/HV7N2Menze.html#FN0; Volker Menze, "The Making of a Church: The Syrian Orthodox in the Shadow of Byzantium and the Papacy" (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 2004). Menze focuses primarily on a later period than this chapter, viz. after Severus' exile in 519. A recent bibliography may also be found in Pauline Allen and Robert Hayward, Severus of Antioch (London: Routledge, 2004).

In ecclesiastical usage, the semantic range of oikonomia was quite wide. As a descriptive term, it referred to the "household" affairs or administration of the church. In a normative sense, it evoked an ideal of "churchmanship"—the right governance of the church as achieved by the bishop. Oikonomia was also an important Christological term referring both to Christ's incarnation (the oikonomia which is in the flesh) and also to God's guiding providence in a general sense. From this latter sense, the bishop's governance or oikonomia, took its cues from a theological narrative in which the divine oikonomia was considered to be guiding human history. As such, oikonomia was both a matter of pragmatism and yet also of the highest order of theology. Indeed, surviving documents from both Philoxenos and Severus offer insight into how they, as miaphysite bishops, negotiated and maintained oikonomia during a period of theological flux. What these documents reveal is somewhat startling, especially given Philoxenos' ardent, even stident, commitment to the miaphysite agenda. His role as heresy-hunter aside, Philoxenos was also a keen bishop and churchman, and as such, a champion of moderation. It is this nexus of pragmatism and theology which this chapter presents as the first context for our study of Philoxenos' Christological concerns.

## "CHALCEDON WAS NEITHER OPENLY PROCLAIMED...NOR INDEED UNIVERSALLY REPUDIATED": MIAPHYSITE ASCENDANCY IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Philoxenos' reputation as a leading miaphysite polemicist rested in part upon his relative success as a metropolitan bishop overseeing a large province situated on one of the most crucial political and ecclesiastical frontiers of the Empire. Since his elevation to the metropolitan see of Euphratensis in 484, Philoxenos had been responsible for the clergy of

the capital city, Mabbug (ancient Hierapolis), and also for twelve lesser bishops who ruled sees throughout the province. Between 484 and 512, Philoxenos and his suffragens made up the core of the fledgling miaphysite leadership in the Syriac and Greek speaking East. <sup>40</sup> In time, Philoxenos was able to translate his more than 25 years of episcopal experience into a triumph when in 512 he oversaw the ordination of Severus as patriarch of Antioch. The elevation of Severus gave the miaphysites at least nominal authority over more than 120 bishoprics throughout Anatolia and Syria.

In order to understand the challenges which Philoxenos, Severus, and the miaphysite hierarchy faced in their moment of ascendancy after 512, we need to consider briefly the turbulent period that preceded the ordination of Severus.<sup>41</sup> It is particularly essential to realize that the miaphysite victory came after more than four decades of highly unstable ecclesiastical politics in Antioch and the Syrian provinces.

#### UNCERTAINTY IN ANTIOCH

It is likely that Philoxenos came to be first involved in the struggles over Chalcedon under the Antiochene patriarch Peter the Fuller. Due to the volatile situation of the time, the miaphysite Peter (d. 488) was twice deposed and reinstated, actively serving as patriarch of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Their influence is well documented by that fact that six of the twelve bishops who consecrated Severus in 512 were from Philoxenos' see of Euphratensis. Ernst Honigmann, Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VIe siècle, CSCO Subsidia 2 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1951), 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> As these events have been adequately presented by several scholars, it will suffice to review them here. For further detail see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 49-74; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition:* 2/1, 236-317; Pauline Allen, "The Definition and Enforcement of Orthodoxy," in *The Cambridge Ancient History:* Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425-600, eds. Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby, *CAH* 14 (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 816-820.

Antioch from 470-71, 475-76, and 484-488.<sup>42</sup> It was during Peter's last period of exile (476-484), that Philoxenos came to the fore as a leader of the Syrian miaphysites.<sup>43</sup> Peter's most notable contribution to the Christological struggles was his introduction of the miaphysite addition to the *Trisagion*. The disputed addition of "who wast crucified for us" to the acclamation for Christ served as a battle-cry for much of Philoxenos' polemics of the period.<sup>44</sup> For his part in the controversy over the hymn, Philoxenos was himself expelled from Antioch during the reign of the Chalcedonian patriarch Calendio (482-484). Philoxenos took advantage of this exile to travel to many of the monasteries of Syria to rally support for the miaphysites. He also undertook a mission to the Emperor Zeno (r. 473-491) to plead for the miaphysite theology.<sup>45</sup>

Zeno's own involvement in the debate over Chalcedon is similarly indicative of the instability of the period. In 476, Zeno had exiled Peter the Fuller as part of his defeat of the pro-miaphysite usurper Basiliscus. Then in 482, Zeno had encouraged rapprochement between the theological parties and had tried to end Christological debate with a gag-order known as the *Henoticon* (issued in 482). For his troubles, he faced more imperial usurpers (this time backed by the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, Calendio), a schism with Rome which would last 35 years, and a declaration by the bishops in Persia rejecting the theology

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. Peter the Fuller.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 33-36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> See the discussion of this in chapter one.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> This confession is preserved as a letter to the emperor: Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Emperor Zeno*, 118-26, 163-73.

of Constantinople. After he put down the pro-Chalcedonian usurpation attempt in 484, Zeno reversed his earlier exile of Peter the Fuller and restored the miaphysite patriarch to the see of Antioch.

#### FROM ANTIOCH TO MABBUG AND BACK

With Peter's return to Antioch, Philoxenos found his miaphysite polemics rewarded. The next year, 485, Philoxenos was made metropolitan bishop of Mabbug. An important garrison city on the Roman border with Persia, Mabbug was the capital of the Roman province of Euphratensis. Zeno had evicted its pro-Chalcedonian bishop in 484, allowing Peter the Fuller to choose a miaphysite replacement.

While Philoxenos' elevation to the see of Mabbug in 485 should be seen as a major step in the miaphysite ascendancy which culminated in the consecration of Severus in 512, at the time it was far from obvious that the miaphysites would gain the upperhand. Both proand anti-Chalcedonian factions could claim strategic victories. In 489, the miaphysites succeeded in having the dyophysite-leaning School of the Persians closed in Edessa, perhaps due to Philoxenos' pressure. In 491, however, the pro-Chalcedonian crowds of Constantinople were able to wring a promise of loyalty to Chalcedon from the miaphysite-friendly emperor Anastasius (491-518) in exchange for permitting him to take the imperial throne. Moreover, in 498 Anastasius permitted the pro-Chalcedonian Flavian to take the patriarchal throne of Antioch. Flavian was a moderate willing to comply with the terms of the *Henoticon* and accordingly unwilling to condemn or discuss Chalcedon. From the

miaphysite perspective, however, Flavian's obedience to the *Henoticon* was viewed as wavering or even subterfuge.

Flavian's position was, in fact, the status quo in the first decade of the sixth-century. Writing at the end of the same century, the Antiochene historian Evagrius Scholasticus summed up the situation this way:

And so, during this period [Anastasius' reign], whereas the Synod at Chalcedon was neither openly proclaimed in the most holy churches, nor indeed universally repudiated, each of the prelates conducted himself according to his belief. And some adhered very resolutely to what had been issued at it, and made no concession with regard to any syllable of what had been defined by it, and did not even indeed admit a change of letter; rather, with great frankness they also recoiled from, and absolutely declined to tolerate communion with those, who did not accept what had been issued by it. Others, on the other hand, not only refused to accept the Synod at Chalcedon and what had been defined by it, but even encompassed it and the Tome of Leo with anathema. Others relied on the *Henoticon* of Zeno, and that even though they were at odds with one another over the one and the two natures, since some were deceived by the composition of the missive, while others inclined rather to greater peace. As a result all the churches were divided into distinct parties, and their prelates had no communion with one another.<sup>46</sup>

Evagrius' observations are accurate on two points. First, in the period before 512, neither side had a clear advantage. This is exemplified by the defeats that Philoxenos and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup>Η μὲν οὖν ἐν Χαλκηδόνι σύνοδος ἀνὰ τούτους τοὺς χρόνους οὕτε ἀναφανδὸν ἐν ταῖς ἀγιωτὰταις ἐκκλησίαις ἐκηρύττετο, οὕτε μὴν ἐκ πάντων ἀπεκηρύττετο. Ἔκαστοι δὲ τῶν προεδρευόντων ὡς εἶχον νομίσεως διεπράττοντο. Κὰν ἔνιοι μὲν τῶν ἐκτεθειμένων αὐτῆ μάλα γεννικῶς ἀντείχοντο, καὶ πρὸς οὐδεμίαν ἐνεδίδοσαν συλλαβὴν τῶν ὁρισθέντων παρ' αὐτῆς, οὐδὲ μὴν γράμματος ἐναλλαγὴν παρεδέχοντο ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ πολλῆς ἀπεπήδων τῆς παρρησίας, καὶ κοινωνεῖν παντελῶς οὐκ ἡνείχοντο τοῖς μὴ δεχομένοις τὰ παρ' αὐτῆς ἐκτεθειμένα. Ἔτεροι δὲ οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἐδέχοντο τὴν ἐν Χαλκηδόνι σὐνοδον καὶ τὰ παρ' αὐτῆς ὁρισθέντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀναθέμασι περιέβαλλον αὐτὴν τε καὶ τὸν Λέοντος τόμον. Ἄλλοι τοῖς ἐνωτικοῖς Ζἡνωνος ἐνισχυρίζοντο, καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς ἀλλήλους διερρωγότες τῆ τε μιῷ καὶ ταῖς δύο φύσεσιν, οἱ μὲν τῆ συνθήκη τῶν γραμμάτων κλαπέντες, οἱ δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὸ εἰρηνικώτερον μᾶλλον ἀποκλίναντες· ὡς πὰσας τὰς ἐκκλησίας εἰς ἱδίας ἀποκριθῆναι μοίρας καὶ μηδὲ κοινωνεῖν ἀλλήλοις τοὺς προεδρεύοντας Evagrius Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, published as The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia, eds. Joseph Bidez and Léon Parmentier (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), 12 §3.30, Text taken from TLG 2733.001. Translation from Evagrius Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, published as The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Vith History of Evagrius Scholasticus, trans. Michael Whitby, TTH 33 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 166-167.

miaphysites suffered at synods in 509 (Antioch) and 511 (Sidon).<sup>47</sup> Second, under the cover of the *Henoticon* both miaphysites and Chalcedonians sought to consolidate their hold upon the church hierarchy.

#### MANIPULATING THE TROUBLED TIMES

The ecclesiastical politics surrounding the *Henoticon*, are most evident in Philoxenos' strategy against Flavian. After his defeat in 509, Philoxenos laid out part of the miaphysite strategy against Flavian in his *Letter to the Monks of Palestine*. The line of attack centered around pressuring Flavian into accepting a miaphysite understanding of the *Henoticon* by adding to his acceptance of the *Henoticon* the following statements: a condemnation of Nestorius's teachers and partisans (namely Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus); an acceptance of Cyril's twelve chapters including their condemnations of Cyril's opponents (Theodoret and Alexander of Mabbug among others); and finally a profession of a single nature Christology against Chalcedon. It would seem that Philoxenos' strategy with these demands was based less on the hope that Flavian would actually accept them than it was on the fact that Flavian's refusal would give Philoxenos' powerful leverage for his removal. 50

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> On these synods see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 64-73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> De Halleux has identified these demands in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 50-51; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Palestine*, published as "*Nouveaux textes inédits de Philoxène de Mabbog: I. Lettre aux moines de Palestine -- Lettre Liminaire au Synodicon d'Éphèse*," ed. and trans. André de Halleux, *Le Muséon* 75, 1-2 (1962): 49. De Halleux does not, however, explicitly connect this to Philoxenos' plan to use monastic violence as I do below. He does note that imperial pressure was involved. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Palestine*, 49-50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of Palestine, 36-37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Thus de Halleux notes, "Pareil programme ne fut certes pas adopté spontanément par les chalcédoniens d'Orient..." de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 49.

In any event, the latter scenario was how Philoxenos' plan of attack played out.

When Flavian refused to anathematize Chalcedon in full at the Synod of Sidon in 511,

Philoxenos used this refusal to rally the opposition. Philoxenos' resources were twofold. In
the first place, he had evidence with which to make a case against Flavian before the

Emperor Anastasius. Secondly, Philoxenos could use these polemical accusations to raise up
monastic discontent. Indeed, the miaphysites enjoyed solid and loyal monastic support from
monasteries in Palestine and Syria. Several talented monks were already among the
miaphysite leadership at Sidon in 511, such as the theologians Severus (the future patriarch)
and Cosmas of Mar Aqiba. Moreover, the miaphysites also enjoyed traditional monastic
support of the less intellectual type. It was the rowdy monks of the Cynegike (Κυνηγιαῆς in

Syria Prima) whom Philoxenos brought to Antioch as shock troops to protest against
Flavian. While these monks seem to have suffered an initial defeat in the city, the uproar
they caused (with the help of equally rowdy intervening Chalcedonian monks) served as a
sufficient pretext for the Emperor Anastasius to dismiss Flavian and install Severus in 512.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Cornelia B. Horn, Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine: The Career of Peter the Iberian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106-111; de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> So both the *Chronicle* of Zachariah of Mitylene and Evagrius' history report. Zachariah of Mitylene, *Syriac Chronicle*, published as *The Syriac Chronicle Known as that of Zachariah of Mitylene*, trans. F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 180; Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History (ITH 33)*, 174-175, §3.32.

# "BECAUSE THEY ARE DEVOID OF THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT": CRISES OF QUALIFICATION AND ALLEGIANCE

For Philoxenos and the miaphysites the elevation of Severus was a major success. As we have seen, however, it was a hard won victory in a period where allegiances were far from sure. Moreover, given the confusing status of the *Henoticon*, it was often not clear where the boundary lines between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians should be drawn. These uncertain conditions continued after 512 in spite of the miaphysite ascendancy. Accordingly, Severus and Philoxenos directed their attention to consolidating the miaphysite coalition through the administration of their sees.<sup>54</sup> Both bishops had to devote a good deal of effort to reminding laity and priests that the church ought to be "a collection of pious men which is joined in one union by right belief."<sup>55</sup> This use of right belief to define the church had the corollary of denying any validity to those who held divergent theological beliefs.

Sometime during of just after the end of the Roman and Persian war of 502-505,

Philoxenos elaborately explained the status of the dyophysites in response to a query from a

Lakhmid governor who ruled the marches between the Roman and Persian border:

But after they [the dyophysites] had blasphemed [at the council of Chalcedon] and torn the true faith and gone out of the sheepfold of life, they were excommunicated and rejected. The Holy Spirit did not remain with them but [instead] a spirit of error

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> The sources in this section are almost entirely taken from texts which I date to the period before Severus and Philoxenos were deposed from their sees (518-19). These same themes can be found in their later works, but they are describing a different situation for the miaphysite clergy. The travails of the miaphysite clergy after 519 have been admirably discussed by Menze in his dissertation. Menze, "Making of a Church", passim.

<sup>55</sup> حمد الما مرايخة مناه من المان ال

and of Satan. And they became devoid and stripped of baptism and of the priesthood and of every mystery of the true Church.<sup>56</sup>

Such an idealized view, very useful in a struggle for theological ascendancy, was not without its difficulties. Upon becoming bishops, Philoxenos and Severus had inherited monks, clergy, and a church hierarchy divided by the theological controversies. Writing to Philoxenos "about a matter upon which we have often already counseled and deliberated," Severus laid out the predicament of receiving those priests ordained by his dyophysite predecessor. <sup>57</sup> Besides the fact that these clergy had formerly belonged to the dyophysite party, it had come to light that some ordinations had occurred in a manner which violated long standing canons (rules recognized by dyophysites and miaphysites alike). These two concerns were no small matters, in fact they were symptoms of two dilemmas confronting miaphysite bishops in this period.

We may summarize the two crises as being matters of qualification and allegiance. Years of theological conflict had driven priests and bishops into exile and cut down on the number of new ordinations (only a bishop could ordain priests and if a region did not have a miaphysite bishop, priests had to be imported). As Volker Menze has shown, some rural areas had been without priests for a generation. In an extreme case, Menze notes a saint's life

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> המלובה בה בה האליבה אלי Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1.1.145, § 1.48. For an other reference to similar discussions between Philoxenos and Severus see Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:1:100.

set in 515 which describes a whole region near the Euphrates (i.e. Philoxenos' backyard!) as without priests or deacons.<sup>58</sup> Beyond their prerequisite for a profession of the miaphysite theology, Philoxenos and Severus could hardly afford to be too particular about their clergy's reputation. Miaphysite priests of perfect pedigree were in short supply.<sup>59</sup> Thus many members of their clergy were under a cloud either from lack of moral qualification for their office or due to a past allegiance to the dyophysite party.

### **CRISIS OF QUALIFICATION**

Both Severus and Philoxenos faced crises over the moral qualifications of their clergy. We have already noted that some of the clergy Severus had inherited in Antioch had been improperly ordained. Specifically, they had paid his predecessor Flavian a fee to hold their offices, a common practice, but nevertheless a violation of the canons with ties to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Commenting on John of Ephesus' "Life of Simeon the Mountaineer," Menze writes: "However, according to John of Ephesus' story of Simeon the Mountaineer, not every village had its own deacon, and was also not enthusiastic to change this. When in 515 CE Simeon reached a quite prosperous village near the Euphrates, bordering to the territory of Claudias, and inquired about their church and how they would receive communion, some of the villagers laughed at him and said: 'How, blessed sir, does the oblation that a man receives profit him? For what [purpose] is the oblation?' Nevertheless, these shepherds felt quite offended when Simeon asked them if they were Jews. They wholeheartedly considered themselves to be Christians although they had been cut off from the sacraments for years. The shepherds even related to the saint that people lived in the mountains who did not know what a church was, and most of their fellows had only seen one at the time they were baptized as children or when their own children were baptized. The neighboring village still had a church, but it was no longer in use, and one of the villagers told Simeon that they would receive the Eucharist only if they had business in a village which had a priest: If not, no one here has this concern for the oblation.' John of Ephesus, of course, intends to point out the villagers' outrageous unchristian [sic] behavior in order to make the achievement of his saint—who installed himself as priest in the second village—even greater. Nevertheless, it is obvious that not every village had a priest and it is necessary to ask why." Menze, "Eucharist in Sixth Century Syria."; John of Ephesus, Lives of the Saints, published as Lives of the Eastern Saints, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, PO 17.1, 18.4, 19.2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1923), 17:233.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Cf. Philoxenos' claim in note 38 above that he had ordained all but one member of his clergy. Even though this is most likely an exaggeration, one wonders how many loyal clergy welcomed his takeover in 485. It is not likely that there were many as Hierapolis had been a bastion of dyophysitism since the first council of Ephesus in 431. See Devreesse, *Patriarcat d'Antioche*, 283.

ancient sin of Simon Magus.<sup>60</sup> In this particular case, public opinion seemed to favor granting leniency, but Severus was nevertheless sufficiently "troubled and harassed" as to write to Philoxenos for advice on how to proceed.<sup>61</sup>

For his own part, Philoxenos faced hostile accusations about the moral quality of his clergy. Specifically they were said to "steal, commit adultery, defraud, plunder, and swear falsely." The indignation of Philoxenos' response is enough to suggest that the accusations may have indeed fit his own clergy. In any case, it is worth noting that this objection over the moral standing of the clergy was itself a product of the age. Philoxenos had, in his own

<sup>60</sup> This was specifically forbidden in canon two at Chalcedon: "If any bishop performs an ordination for money and puts the unsaleable grace on sale, and ordains for money a bishop, a chorepiscopus, a presbyter or a deacon or some other of those numbered among the clergy; or appoints a manager, a legal officer or a warden for money, or any other ecclesiastic at all for personal sordid gain; let him who has attempted this and been convicted stand to lose his personal rank; and let the person ordained profit nothing from the ordination or appointment he has bought; but let him be removed from the dignity or responsibility which he got for money. And if anyone appears to have acted even as a go-between in such disgraceful and unlawful dealings, let him too, if he is a cleric, be demoted from his personal rank, and if he is a lay person or a monk, let him be anathematized." Εἴ τις ἐπίσκοπος ἐπὶ χρήμασι χειροτονίαν ποιήσαιτο καὶ εἰς πρᾶσιν καταγάγοι τὴν ἄπρατον χάριν καὶ χειροτονήσοι ἐπὶ χρήμασιν ἐπίσκοπον ἢ χωρεπίσκοπον ἢ πρεσβύτερον ἢ διάκονον ἢ ἔτερόν τινα τῶν ἐν τῶι κλήρωι καταριθμουμένων ή προβάλοιτο έπὶ χρήμασιν οἰκονόμον ή ἔκδικον ή παραμονάριον ή ὅλως τινὰ τοῦ κανόνος δι' αἰσχροκέρδειαν οἰκείαν, ό τοῦτο ἐπιχειρήσας ἐλεγχθεὶς κινδυνευέτω περὶ τὸν οἰκεῖον βαθμὸν καὶ ὁ χειροτονούμενος μηδεν έκ τῆς κατ' έμπορίαν ώφελείσθω χειροτονίας ἢ προβολῆς, άλλ'ἔστω άλλότριος τῆς άξίας ἢ τοῦ φροντίσματος οὖπερ ἐπὶ χρήμασιν ἔτυχεν. εἱ δέ τις καὶ μεσιτεύων φανείη τοῖς οὔτως αἰσχροῖς καὶ ἀθεμίτοις λήμμασιν, καὶ οὖτος εἰ μὲν κληρικὸς εἴη, τοῦ οἰκείου ἐκπιπτέτω βαθμοῦ· εἰ δὲ λαικὸς ἢ μονάζων, ἀναθεματιζέσθω. Canons of Chalcedon, published as The Council of Chalcedon - A.D. 451: Canons, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 1:87-88. Severus was likely referring to an older canon from the time of Chrysostom to which this canon also refers. Cf. Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:1:145; Canons of Chalcedon, published as The Seven Ecumenical Councils, trans. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, NPNF 14 (Edinburgh: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 14:268, notes.

<sup>61 ...</sup>אם אבא Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:1:146.

theological polemics, asserted that the Holy Spirit did not descend upon the altars of the heretical dyophysites because their incorrect belief had separated them from the true church. Similar criticism of immoral priests may have been a retort from Philoxenos' opponents which was taken seriously by some of his own followers.

In his response, Philoxenos chose to down play the importance of the morality of the priest. While priests in serious sin ought to be deposed, he thought that their sin did not impugn the efficacy of their ministry. The validity of their Eucharistic oblations were dependant upon God's grace and proper ordination by the "hand of God" through the Church. Although he did not say so explicitly, Philoxenos understood the canonical laying on of hands to be an ordination which had the proper approval of a miaphysite bishop.

<sup>63</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 278 n. 11. See the discussion of this in chapter one.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> One should bear in mind how closely concerns of proper priestly behavior and proper theological belief lay in the mind of late antique Christians. The Council of Nicaea, revered for its supposed heresydefeating profession of faith, was held in the highest regard as a symbol of identity by almost all Christians in the early sixth century. Besides this creed produced by the 318 fathers, however, Nicaea produced another document which was equally important in giving the Christian church unity: twenty canons which were ratified and augmented by subsequent councils. While two of these canons do address issues of heresy, it is revealing that the lion's share address issues concerning the clergy (fifteen of the twenty canons). Among these canons one even finds a couple which lend themselves to the concerns over the right of immoral priests to exercise their office. Canons 9 and 10 state: "9. If any have been promoted presbyters without examination, and then upon investigation have confessed their sins, and if after their confession men have imposed hands upon such people, being moved to act against the canon, the canon does not admit these people, for the catholic church vindicates only what is above reproach. 10. If any have been promoted to ordination through the ignorance of their promoters or even with their connivance, this fact does not prejudice the church's canon; for once discovered they are to be deposed." εἴ τινες ἀνεξετάστως προήχθησαν πρεσβύτεροι, εἶτα ἀνακρινόμενοι ώμολόγησαν τὰ ἡμαρτημένα αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὁμολογησάντων αὐτῶν, παρὰ κανόνα κινούμενοι ἄνθρωποι τοῖς τοιούτοις χεῖρας ἐπιτεθείκασι, τούτους ὁ κανὼν οὐ προσίεται. τὸ γὰρ ἀνεπίληπτον ἐκδικεῖ ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία.... ὅσοι προεχειρίσθησαν τῶν παραπεπτωκότων κατὰ ἄγνοιαν ἢ καὶ προειδότων τῶν προχειρισαμένων, τοῦτο οὐ προκρίνει τῷ κανόνι τῷ ἐκκλησιαστικῷ· γνωσθέντες γὰρ καθαιρεθήσονται Canons of the First Council of Nicaea, published as First Council of Nicaea - 325: Canons, in Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 10-11.

<sup>65</sup> محسلام Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memra on the Faith by Questions (Part II), fol. 104r.

Therein lay the difference between a priest who was immoral and a priest who was a heretic. In Philoxenos' estimation, the former might be used by the Holy Spirit as long as he had a proper link to the true Church. The latter had, by falling under anathema, broken the link and was no longer a means to God. Swinging into rhetorical full stride, Philoxenos swept away all concerns about the character of a priest, what mattered to him was a canonical link to the church:

"I swear to you.... If upon Satan are laid the hands of ordination to the priesthood, and if he breaks the holy elements, they are valid for me and I receive [them] from him. And thus it is considered by me to be like that which Simon Peter broke and nothing is lacking from it!" 66

Canonically ordaining Satan to the priesthood would be quite a task for any bishop, nevertheless, this is an apt description of the issue that Philoxenos and Severus faced as they addressed the other great crisis which affected their clergy—the question of allegiance.

#### **CRISIS OF ALLEGIANCE**

When the miaphysite Severus assumed the patriarchal throne in 512, he inherited a clergy of questionable loyalty who now sought to join the miaphysite communion. Fortunately, the canons of the Council of Nicaea had set down provisions for receiving repentant clergy from the heretical sects. Some bishops (including Cyril of Alexandria) argued that it was enough for dyophysite clergy to anathematize their heresy and then be restored to their offices as priests as had been done in the case of repentant Arians. Others

took a stricter view and suggested that dyophysite clergy needed to be re-baptized and reordained as Nicaea's Canon XIX had mandated for the followers of Paul of Samosata:

Concerning the former Paulinists who seek refuge in the catholic church, it is determined that they must be rebaptised unconditionally. Those who in the past have been enrolled among the clergy, if they appear to be blameless and irreproachable, are to be rebaptised and ordained by the bishop of the catholic church. But if on inquiry they are shown to be unsuitable, it is right that they should be deposed.<sup>67</sup>

The issue was open to interpretation. Some hard-line miaphysites wrote to Severus to argue that "men coming from them [the dyophysites] are not to be received, but their 'end is to be burned,' because they are devoid of the grace of the Holy Spirit." This extreme view should come as no surprise when compared to the rhetoric which the miaphysites had employed in the polemics which led to their ascendancy. For example in his *Letter to Maron of Anazarbus* Philoxenos had written: "Therefore, those who anathematize the [dyophysite] heretics are not anathematizing bishops but [they are anathematizing] people who have become ministers of the Accuser."

<sup>67</sup> Περὶ τῶν ἐκ Παύλου τοῦ Σαμοσατέως προσιόντων. περὶ τῶν Παυλιανισάντων, εἶτα προσφευγόντων τῆ καθολικῆ ἐκκλησία ὅρος ἐκτέθειται ἀναβαπτίζεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἐξάπαντος. εἰ δέ τινες ἐν τῷ παρεληλυθότι χρόνῳ ἐν τῷ κλήρῳ ἐξητάσθησαν, εἰ μὲν ἄμεμπτοι καὶ ἀνεπίληπτοι φανεῖεν, ἀναβαπτισθέντες χειροτονείσθωσαν ὑπὸ τοῦ τῆς καθολικης ἐκκλησίας ἐπισκόπου· εἰ δὲ ἀνάκρισις ἀνεπιτηδείους αὐτοὺς εὐρίσκοι, καθαιρεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς προσήκει. ὑσαὐτως δὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν διακονισῶν καὶ ὅλως περὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ κανόνι ἐξεταζομένων ὁ αὐτὸς τὑπος παραφυλαχθήσεται. ἐμνήσθημεν δὲ τῶν διακονισοῶν τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς, τῶν ἐν τῷ σχήματι ἐξετασθεισῶν, ἐπεὶ μήτε χειροθεσίαν τινὰ ἔχουσιν, ὡς ἐξὰπαντος ἐν τοῖς λαϊκοῖς αὐτὰς ἑξετάζεσθαι. Canons of the First Council of Nicaea (Tanner edition), 15.

<sup>69</sup> סְּהָהֵא הְצֹּזְאֵל אֹלֵה :מְחַבּׁהְא הְצִּיבְּיִל בּעִרָּיִהְ בְּעִּיבִּילְ בּעִרִּילִי בּעִרִּילְ בּעִרִּילְ בּעִרִּילִילְ Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Maron of Anazarbus, 36. It should also be noted that Severus agreed with Philoxenos' argument about the absence of the Holy Spirit and he mentioned a similar line of thought in Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:2:331 §V.6. See chapters four and five for a more detailed treatment of this language of spiritual struggle in Philoxenos'works.

Ministers of Satan or not, both spiritual and practical concerns dictated that Severus and Philoxenos had to find a way to rehabilitate repentant dyophysite clergy. From a spiritual perspective, Severus sought to imitate earlier church leaders in longing "for the abolition of divisions and for church unity" as beneficial to the spiritual health of the Church. Receiving these clergy also had pragmatic benefits for the miaphysite cause. For example, Severus took this element into consideration in the affair over a certain heiromonk named Mark at a monastery lying somewhere between Tarsus and Antioch. Mark was a former supporter of Chalcedon who was almost unanimously favored by monks of his small monastery to become abbot. Writing to the Bishop of Tarsus, Severus urged that if Mark was willing to anathematize Chalcedon in writing, his past allegiance should not be held against him and he should be named abbot. In a second letter on the affair, Severus explained that given the small size of the monastery and Mark's popularity: "it is better that he should be canonically received now while he is humbled, than that, desired as he is by many persons, ...he should get the monastery under his control with liberty to follow the impiety with his head bare and unashamed."

At times, Philoxenos was even more lenient than Severus. In the synod of Antioch in 513, Philoxenos protested against Severus' decision to make unenforceable depositions of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> אביגם המגים המגים אביגם אביגם Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:2:354 \$\\$V.6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:2:325-329.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> رحم عربه محمد عدم المحاملة المحمد المحمد

the popular Chalcedonian bishops of Apamea. He argued that such action would humiliate the patriarch and hurt the miaphysite cause.<sup>73</sup> These examples from Severus and Philoxenos reveal yet another side to the crisis of allegiance. Miaphysite leaders had to take into account the powerful force of monastic and lay loyalty to particular bishops and priests.

This attachment expressed itself most clearly in the liturgical practice of reading the names of bishops (both living and dead) and saints immediately before the consecration of the Eucharist. Hith regard to the living, these lists of names read from liturgical diptychs indicated horizontal lines of communion in the present to the various church hierarchies. With regard to the departed faithful they indicated a vertical line of communion through the past up to the Apostles and Christ himself. As we have seen, Philoxenos and Severus sought to limit communion to those who accepted miaphysite right belief. Making this a reality in the diptychs, however, was a difficult task. A strict policy would have meant removing the names of popular bishops, some of whom had died before the battle lines of the current controversy were clear cut.

Moreover popular allegiances to some bishops and priests were not based on which theology they held but on spiritual relationships and social networks. Removing the name of a bishop could bring into the question the validity of all of the ordinations, baptisms, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of the Orient (Part II), 6, 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> On the diptychs see Menze, "Making of a Church", 76ff; F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907-1970), s.v. *diptyques*; Robert F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: The Diptychs*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 238 (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1991), 53-56, 121-4, 178-80.

oblations he had performed.<sup>75</sup> Clergy who had received ordination and laity who had received salvation (through baptism and the Eucharist) did not take such gestures well, and on occasion were agitated enough by the removal of names to revolt against their miaphysite bishops.<sup>76</sup>

#### "That the Creation Might Be United to the Creator": A Divine Solution

Given both the complexity of the crises they faced and the nature of their episcopal responsibilities, we should not be startled that Philoxenos and Severus sought out a moderate course of action. What may be surprising is that the pragmatic solution they settled on required renegotiating some of the same stark distinctions which were part of their strategy for ascendancy. As we shall see the difference between polemic and administration was one of strictness and leniency.

#### **STRICTNESS**

Strictly speaking the dyophysite clergy were not priests at all, but ministers of Satan.

On the other hand, strict speech was not always appropriate. So Severus explained in a letter to the monks of Mar Bassus:

For, if we are about to require strictness like our strictness which we observed when we were living in seclusion in monasteries, we shall not suffer presbyters or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> See the related objections raised in Severus of Antioch, *Collection of Letters*, published as *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch: From Numerous Syriac Manuscripts*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, PO 12, 14 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919-1920), 12:387, Letter XLV.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> In one case, Severus lamented an overzealous miaphysite bishop whose lack of tact on the names in the diptychs caused an uprising among the dyophysite clergy who had been ready to convert. Severus of Antioch, *Select Letters of Severus*, 1:1:85-86, §I.22.

archimandrites, or anyone else who assented to the synod of Chalcedon, to be named [in the liturgical diptychs]. But, if we have regard to the complete conjunction and unity of the holy churches, which extends to many countries and churches, it is not easy suddenly to observe or think of any such rule: and, if we do, we shall unwittingly fall into useless confusion, and upset everything, since such things are not of a kind to stand at all in the way of the general benefit of peace.<sup>77</sup>

Canonical strictness (Ἀκρίβεια in Greek, κολοδοδο in Syriac) was useful in miaphysite polemic against the dyophysite hierarchy, but had to be sacrificed in the miaphysite administration of their own hierarchy. Severus argued that the wise physician must apply the medicine which best fits the disease. Not given to moderate rhetoric, Philoxenos rang a resounding defense of this moderate position: "Strictness is that which troubles the church and disturbs the faith and must be considered as cruelty and as a matter that angers God."

#### **O**IKONOMIA

In place of strictness, Philoxenos turned to a concept which had become a watch word for the pro-Nicene party in the Arian controversy: οἰκονομία in Greek or the linked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:2:334 §V.6.

המשבה האשלאה ביו אומים האשלאה האו איני האמשבה איני האמשבה איני האמשבה איני האמשבה איני האמשבה האואר האיני האמשבה האואר האיני האמשבה האואר האיני האמשבה האואר האיני האמשבה האואר האואר האיני האמשבה האואר הא

pair in Syriac κλαίως and καμίας. These terms, which in the patristic period carried the meaning of "right government" in the manner of God's gracious right government of spiritual affairs, had a distinguished pedigree by the time they reached the sixth century. Basil of Caesarea had introduced the term into the discussion of receiving heretics in his first letter to Amphilochius in which he explained that some heretics were not required to be re-baptized (even though that would have been canonically appropriate). The reason for such leniency was "for the sake of the right ruling (οἰκονομία) of the many." Following the First Council of Ephesus, Cyril of Alexandria made a similar appeal to οἰκονομία when he put the peace of the church before canonical strictness in his agreement with John of Antioch. 82

Such moderation grounded in *oikonomia*, should not, however, be considered a deviation from the miaphysite standards. As Severus explained, allowing a few extracanonical leniencies did not threaten the triumph of right belief. These anomalies would be soon corrected in God's providence:

But, if the holding of the orthodox faith, and an anathema of every heresy reigns in the churches, and whole countries and provinces and populous churches confess one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> I am grateful to Yannis Papadoyanakis for his insight into these terms. The following article is also informative: André de Halleux, "'Oikonomia' in the First Canon of Saint Basil," *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 6 (1987): 53-64. It is ironic that de Halleux makes no reference to Philoxenos in this article!

<sup>81</sup> οἰκονομίας ἔνεκα τῶν πολλῶν Basil of Caesarea, Letter to Amphilochius, On the Canons, published as Letter CLXXXVIII, in Saint Basil: The Letters III, ed. and trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Loeb Classical Library 243 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 3:16.

<sup>82</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter to Maximus*, published as *Ad Maximum diaconum antiochenum*, in *S.P.N. Cyrilli...opera...omnia*, eds. and trans. Joannis Auberti and J.P. Migne, PG 77 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1859), 77:320-21.

uncorrupted confession, then names which are thought to pollute are inundated by the multitude of streams. It is good that no particle of a dead body should be introduced even into a large quantity of water; but if it in fact happens to be introduced, it is cleansed by the quantity of streams, and swamped by the quantity of cleansing.<sup>83</sup>

By combining such faithful optimism with a pragmatic realism about what would be tolerated on a popular level, both Philoxenos and Severus practiced *oikonomia* in refraining from purging all the names of their opponents from the diptychs. Indeed, Philoxenos left the name of his predecessor, a vacillating supporter of Chalcedon and dyophysite theology, on the very diptych kept in his cathedral at Hierapolis. <sup>84</sup> Likewise Severus sought to admit repentant clergy "in a course of lenient mildness…a course perhaps not wholly inconsistent with canonical strictness." This repudiation of strictness was not a contradiction. It was a calculated part of miaphysite efforts to win over the dyophysites.

For Philoxenos and Severus, this calculation is perhaps best exemplified in their embrace of the *Henoticon* edict, a compromise solution which was essentially an imperial gagrule on theological debate. <sup>86</sup> Severus found support for such an approach in the words of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:1:20, §I.3; Severus of Antioch, Collection of Letters, 12:296-297, Letter XXXIX.

 $<sup>^{85}</sup>$  אינבא אייבל האסא אייבל אייבל אייבל אייבל אייבל אייבא Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:1:146,  $\S$ 1.49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Severus had to write in defense of Philoxenos to the Alexandrians when their support for the *Henoticon* came under fire from miaphysite purists. Severus of Antioch, *Collection of Letters*, 12:296-297, Letter XXXIX.

apostle Paul: "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." As we shall see below, it is this soteriological goal which provides the key to understanding the paradoxical concept of episcopal *oikonomia*.

#### A GREATER OIKONOMIA

Thus far we have considered oikonomia in its narrow technical sense of administration or governance. In late antique theological parlance, however, the term had a far more common usage referring to God's providential workings known as the divine oikonomia or the "oikonomia of Christ which is in the flesh (מברבושה המבישה אלים בישה אלים בישה המבישה אלים בישה המבישה בישה המבישה ה

<sup>87</sup> Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 1:2:347, §V.6. The Biblical citation is 1 Corinthians 9:22.

<sup>88</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> See for example: Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Book of Sentences (CSCO 9)*, 33ff; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380)*, 31-32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 392), 65.

In his *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, Philoxenos went even further to charge that the dyophysites' chief mistake was their erroneous interpretation of his preferred proof text (John 1:14, "The word became flesh and dwelt in us"). <sup>91</sup> This text was of such importance that Philoxenos declared it "the foundation of the entire edifice of the *oikonomia* in the flesh." <sup>92</sup> The accuracy of his assertion aside, it can be confirmed that the concept of *oikonomia* (in its incarnational and soteriological sense) was foundational to Philoxenos' polemics. In the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, alone, he discussed it over forty times. <sup>93</sup>

We will return to the structure of the *Commentary on the Prologue of John* in chapter three; the question here is to determine the relationship between Philoxenos' usage of *oikonomia* as an incarnational term and his advocacy of *oikonomia* as a rule of moderation for episcopal administration. At first glance, the two concepts seem to be unrelated; the former being descriptive and the latter normative; the former referring in general to God's work in salvation and the latter a specific course for administration by bishops. <sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the two terms are linked both in their root reference to governance and, more importantly, in the fact that divine *oikonomia* was considered to set the standard for the bishop's *oikonomia*.

In his polemical exchange with the dyophysite monk Habib (c. 484), Philoxenos had laid out as a general principle, that by definition in God's *oikonomia* (क्रेक्टर्ट्टर), it was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> See the discussion below in note 224.

<sup>92</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 207.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John, published as Commentaire du prologue johannique (Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14,534), version, trans. André de Halleux, CSCO 381 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1977), 26.

<sup>94</sup> Indeed, standard lexical practice separates these two definitions. See the treatment in G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), s.v. οἰκονομία.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> On the central place of paradox in the structure and rhetoric of late antique Christianity see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 155-188.

Here in the heart of Philoxenos' Christology, we find a clue to understanding his willingness to make pragmatic adjustments as a bishop. Accommodation and contradictions were part of the divine *oikonomia* upon which episcopal *oikonomia* was based. In fact, the willingness of Philoxenos and Severus to compromise on doctrinal issues was not so much a contradiction of their theology as an effort to follow it in its affirmation of paradox. Thus Philoxenos was willing to compromise on doctrinal issues as long as he was sure that right doctrine and right practice would ultimately prevail under God's governance. In short, Philoxenos' vision of a divine *oikonomia* served as the ultimate reference point for both his theological polemics and his episcopal administration.

#### CONCLUSION

From this broader vision of divine triumph, we are in a position to gauge the defeated tone of Philoxenos in exile with which we began this chapter. Both Severus and Philoxenos saw their fortunes change with the death of the Emperor Anastasius in 518. The next Emperor Justin I (r. 518–527) favored the Chalcedonian theology with the result that Philoxenos, Severus, and many other miaphysite clergy were exiled. Returning to Philoxenos' lament, we can better understand his anguish. His was not simply the complaint of a loser in an acrimonious battle which saw many casualties. His greatest sorrow came from the fact that those who dealt him the hardest blows were those to whom he had shown *oikonomia*. As he noted about his own anathema by his former clergy:

Even if they were forced, like all the others, to accept the other bishop, they did not have to anathematize me.... Indeed when I first became [their bishop], I did not demand that any of them anathematize my predecessor.... Nevertheless their

anathema does not separate me from the priesthood, because it is the faith which they have anathematized first and then me on account of it.<sup>99</sup>

In short, Philoxenos lamented not being shown oikonomia.

As Philoxenos would be the first to attest, the theological controversies of the early sixth century were harsh and at times violent. Nevertheless, we should not assume that the combatants were as unbending as their rhetoric. This contrast can be seen in the episcopal administration of Philoxenos and Severus. In his polemics, Philoxenos was anxious to strictly separate the orthodox from the heretics. On a human level, however, he used the administration of his see as a tool of reconciliation. In adjusting his theological standards to the demands of his situation, Philoxenos affirmed as one of the highest values of miaphysite theology that the actions of God were a paradox and subject to a humble lowering to the human level.

In our examination of this paradox, we have considered several elements which we will meet again in later chapters. First, we have surveyed the highly unstable ecclesiastical environment within which the late-fifth- and early-sixth-century Christological conflicts took place. Allegiances were unclear and affiliations could change rapidly. Against this, one of Philoxenos' and Severus' strategies was to use sharp denunciations to demarcate boundaries. At the same time, they also chose to show leniency and make compromises to win over undecided parties. Guiding them in this balancing act was their vision of *oikonomia*, a holistic understanding of the conflict between heresy and the orthodox faith writ large in a cosmic

יה, המשפאר האמינה ואים ביל האמינה אינה ביל האמינה אותר שמחפאר הוא המינה האמינה האמינה הא ביל האינה האמינה ביל הגיש ביל האינה האינה ביל האינה בילי האינה בילי האינה בילי בילולים Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of Senun (CSCO 231), 84.

scheme of divine action. As we shall see in the following chapters, Philoxenos' polemics were not written in isolation from a broad vision of the Christian life and practice. His polemical appeals were often to theologically undecided monks who had concerns other than those of theology (perhaps like the monks at the monastery outside Tarsus who were set on making Mark the Heiromonk their abbot regardless of his Christological views). From Philoxenos' perspective, such monks needed to be convinced that opposition to dyophysite doctrine was essential to the unfolding of divine salvation. Accordingly, his polemics presented themselves as one part of the divine *oikonomia*, of which Christ's incarnation was the central act and in which the many tasks of monk, bishop, and layman each had a part.

#### CHAPTER TWO

## MONASTIC PRACTICE AND DIVINE KNOWLEDGE: THE EVAGRIAN BACKGROUND TO PHILOXENOS' VISION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE

For we are persuaded the foundation of the [ascetic] lifestyle is orthodoxy of faith, without which one is not even able to approach keeping the commandments. Just as is said by one of the fathers, "The performance of the commandments cannot, by itself, purify the strengths of the soul if the true faith which is proper to those commandments is not found in it. [Therefore] it seemed [to me] that I should dictate a statement on the faith in a few words and send it to you...<sup>100</sup>

— Letter to Patricius of Edessa

#### INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter we have seen how Philoxenos relied heavily on monastic support to achieve the miaphysite victory over Flavian. Committed miaphysite monks provided both the brains (in the person of Severus, among others) and the brawn for that victory. In addition to this committed miaphysite core, however, Philoxenos sought to win over undecided clergy and monasteries through appeal and compromise. Such compromise was possible because Philoxenos understood the Christological debates within a larger vision of Christian practice and divine *oikonomia*.

In this chapter we consider directly the monastic milieu within which Philoxenos frequently operated, not only in the Christological struggles but also in his duties as a bishop and in his ascetic theology. By understanding this ascetic context, we can understand how

Philoxenos defined "practice" and how he related it to knowledge of God. Specifically, in both his ascetic counsel and his Christological polemic, Philoxenos drew upon an elaborate system of practice and divine knowledge which he had adapted from the work of Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345-399).

To this end, we begin with the above words from one of Philoxenos' letters of ascetic counsel. In this letter, Philoxenos gave notice to the Edessene monk Patricius that in addition to the main body of his letter, which was a commentary on the proper practice of monastic contemplation (θεωρία), he was attaching a brief exposition of the orthodox faith. <sup>101</sup> At first glance a letter from a bishop to a monk giving advice on the monastic life and on right doctrine is hardly out of the ordinary. Under closer scrutiny, however, this postscript to Philoxenos' *Letter to Patricius* provides several clues about the monastic context to which Philoxenos addressed himself.

Specifically we will consider below three aspects of Philoxenos' appeals to monastic audiences, all of which are illustrated in the quotation above. First, we survey the make up of Philoxenos' audiences by identifying which Philoxenian texts have specific monastic addressees as well as what can be known about these groups. Second, the bulk of this chapter will consist of an examination of the understanding of monasticism which Philoxenos drew from Evagrius Ponticus. Finally, this chapter will conclude by evaluating how Philoxenos appropriated and adapted the Evagrian system to his situation. We will ask

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Regrettably, the exposition has not been preserved in the manuscript tradition.

how Evagrian epistemology and psychology offered an anchor for Philoxenos' polemics, laying out the themes to be considered in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

### "IF IT IS RIGHT THAT THE COMMANDMENTS OF OUR LORD BE KEPT...": PHILOXENOS' MONASTIC MILIEU

That Philoxenos would attach a doctrinal addendum to his letter to Patricius hints at what may have been a typical matter of correspondence for the bishop of Mabbug. First it is noteworthy that the occasion for Philoxenos' letter was an ascetic inquiry from a monk. Patricius asked: "If it is right that the commandments of our Lord be kept in deed, or if there is some way in which one may be saved without keeping them?" His was not the only exchange with Philoxenos seeking ascetic advice. The rapid dissemination of Philoxenos' ascetic writings, the *Discourses*, had earned him a reputation for ascetic wisdom, and numerous letters survive in which Philoxenos gave counsel on the monastic life. 104

<sup>103</sup> For further examples see Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to One Newly Become a Disciple, published as "A Letter of Philoxenos of Mabbug Sent to a Novice," ed. and trans. Gunnar Olinder, Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift 47 (1942): i-20; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Discourse on the Monastic Life, in MS BL Add. 14604, fols. 96v-98v; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to One Having Become a Disciple from Judaism, published as "Une Lettre inédite de Philoxène de Mabboug à un juif converti engagé dans la vie monastique," ed. and trans. M. Albert, L'Orient Syrien 6 (1961): 41-50; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to a Scholasticus Having Become a Monk, published as "Une Lettre inedite de Philoxène de Mabboug à un avocat, devenu moine, tenté par Satan," ed. and trans. François Graffin, L'Orient Syrien 5, 2 (1960): 183-96; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Recluse Monks, in MS BL Add. 14577, fols. 101vb-102vb.

<sup>104</sup> As a testimony to the popularity of the *Discourses*, it should be noted that several copies from the sixth-century survive, and these works were preserved more than his other oeuvres in later manuscript copies. See the analysis of the manuscripts in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 281-285. See also the older but still useful table in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 2:xciv-xcv.

#### PHILOXENIAN AUDIENCE

It was not only Philoxenos' ascetic advice, however, which was addressed to monks or ascetic communities. The majority of his writings were to monastic audiences. 105 Before his ordination as bishop, Philoxenos had spent two years of exile (482-484) as an itinerant visitor to the monasteries of Syria, Palestine, Constantinople, and perhaps even further afield from Antioch. 106 The monastic connections formed during this period are readily apparent in his writings from both before and after his ordination. Philoxenos' Christological polemics addressed to monastic communities may be grouped under two broad headings. On the one hand, some were composed as statements of faith, written by Philoxenos with monastic backing and sent out as testimony to both ecclesiastical and secular leadership. Philoxenos' Letter to the Monks on the Faith (482 or earlier), Letter to the Emperor Zeno (c. 484), Letter to the Monks of Palestine (c. 509), and his Letter to All the Monks of the Orient (after 519) are such professions of faith. In other letters, Philoxenos wrote directly to monastic communities to rebut theological opponents who had taken refuge there. Thus he composed his replies to Habib (c. 480s) and sent them to the monastery where Habib was a guest. Likewise, later in his career he wrote to clergy in Edessa directly warning them of Stephen Bar Sudaili (c. 510s). 107 He opposed Stephen's heretical Origenist and Evagrian cosmological doctrines and

<sup>105</sup> This is even beyond the portion of his writings to monks which de Halleux qualifies as "la presque totalité des lettres dogmatiques philoxéniennes." de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 197.

<sup>106</sup> de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, 37.

<sup>107</sup> de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, 259.

warned the presbyters Abraham and Orestes lest "his blasphemous books... fall into any person's hands and especially into those of nuns dwelling within church-precincts...."<sup>108</sup>

#### INSIDE THE MONASTIC SOUL

Of particular note, however, are some writings which seem to bridge these two classifications (statements of faith and Christological polemic). These writings are the letters and treatises in which Philoxenos aimed at rallying indifferent or insufficiently committed monastic centers to join the miaphysite cause. Examples of texts in this category include the two letters to the Monks of Beth Gogol (c. 484 and after 486), the two letters to the monks of Teleda (482-484 and date unkown), and also the *Letter to the Monks of Senun* (after 519). <sup>109</sup>

These letters reveal much about the monastic context of Philoxenos' writings. First, they are marked by the way in which Philoxenos presented the fight against heresy as a part of the monastic life. We catch a glimpse of such an understanding of asceticism and right doctrine in the postscript to Patricius above. Secondly, and by implication, these letters reveal that not all monastic centers agreed that their monastic vocation obligated involvement in the Christological controversies. Because of these competing visions of the monastic life, these texts allow us a glimpse into the monastic psychology of the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Some monks were reluctant to get involved in controversies over heresy because they saw such involvement as interfering with the other-worldly

<sup>108</sup> על משבי המפזמג'ז רבאב במבו זידיז מר :הפליד עיר במבאמן באם בע האודי הבאמן באני האידי הבאמן באני האידי הבאמן באני האידי הבאמן. רבונדי האידי בבעד האידים בעניי האידים ברניי און Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Abraham and Orestes (Frothingham edition), 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> See the dates assigned in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, passim.

contemplation of their monastic life.<sup>110</sup> Philoxenos argued almost exactly the opposite. He contended that holding and defending the orthodox faith were essential to the practice of divine contemplation.<sup>111</sup> In both cases, similar ascetic systems of contemplation were in play. In order to understand the role of contemplation for Philoxenos and his monastic audience, we must turn to a consideration of the influential ascetic theories of Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345-399). In doing so, we can grasp the broader monastic psychology which served as the intellectual backdrop to Philoxenos' Christological polemics.

### KNOWLEDGE AND INCOMPREHENSIBILITY WITHOUT END: THE ASCETIC SYSTEM OF EVAGRIUS PONTICUS

In spite of having been implicated in the Origenist controversy of the early fifth century, Evagrius' writings enjoyed considerable respect nearly a century later when Philoxenos began to write his own monastic treatises. As evidenced from their survival in a multiplicity of Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, and Latin translations, Evagrius' ascetic

Thus he argued in his Letter to the Monks on Faith: "...do not desist from fighting zealously for the truth, saying: "We are solicitous for the stillness of our ascetic life." אביס בעל א בים שלים. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks on Faith (Vaschalde edition), 143. An excellent example of this position is the Great Old Man, Barsanuphius of Gaza. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper has shown how this monastic leader (and contemporary of Severus) was disinclined to participate in the controversies of his day, notwithstanding friendly overtures to the miaphysite side. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 25-26, 110-111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> As we shall see in our closer analysis of Philoxenos' postscript below, in the monastic apothegm which he cites, faith has been substituted for the term contemplation.

<sup>112</sup> On the legacy of the first Origenist controvery, William Harmless explains "One irony, little noted, is that efforts to suppress Origenism actually widened its influence. 'Origenist' monks settled down elsewhere, put pen to parchment, and composed a host of influential histories and spiritual treatises. In the process, they impressed Evagrian ideas in locales ranging from Palestine to the Latin West." William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 363.

chapters were widely read and received in late antiquity. <sup>113</sup> Philoxenos had access to Evagrius' works from at least one of two separate translations into Syriac. Specifically, the version which Philoxenos used had been expurgated to remove some of its controversial cosmological elements. <sup>114</sup> It is this emended Syriac version which influenced Philoxenos' own ascetic system. We will give priority to the adapted Syriac version (titled S<sub>1</sub> in modern usage to distinguish it from a separate uncensored Syriac translation, S<sub>2</sub>) at the points where the translators diverged from Evagrius' original text. What follows, then, is a summary of the Evagrian system as received in the Syriac ascetic tradition. <sup>115</sup>

#### THE EVAGRIAN SYSTEM

As recondite as Evagrius' spiritual philosophy may have been, at its core was a very simple and structured model of progression in the monastic life. William Harmless has summarized this system in two principal steps:

Evagrius divides the spiritual life into two large stages: the life of ascetic practice (praktikė) and the life of mystical knowing (pnostikė).... The beginning of the ascetic life, of praktikė, is the same as the beginning of Christian life: faith. And, as Evagrius notes, the "offspring of true faith" is "the fear of God." Evagrius uses the Biblical term "fear of God" for that sense of awe and gratitude for the wonders of what God has done. This awe, serves as a "custodian" that leads one "in keeping the commandments." ... The second stage is the life of mystical knowledge, what Evagrius called gnostikė, from the Greek word gnōsis ("knowledge"). Here the monk

<sup>113</sup> On the manuscript traditions of the *Praktikos* see Claire Guillaumont's work in Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, published as *Traité pratique*: *Ou, le moine*, eds. and trans. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, SC 170-171 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 318-337. We shall return to the Syriac evidence below.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> These elements included the Origenist idea of *apokatastasis*—hence Philoxenos could condemn Evagrian cosmology in the work of Stephen Bar Sudaili and yet draw upon an Evagrian ascetic corpus which lacked many of the extreme conclusions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> It should, of course, be noted that much of Evagrius' corpus survives only in Syriac. In particular, the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, perhaps his crowning work, survives primarily in Syriac versions.

embarks on a life of genuine contemplation.... The end point of the first stage of ascetic practice is passionlessness, which blossoms into love; the end point of this second stage is a mystical knowledge of God.<sup>116</sup>

This system was presented in its most complete form in a trilogy of works: the *Praktikos* (Λόγος πράκτικος), the *Gnostikos* (Γνωστικός), and the *Kephalaia Gnostica* (Κεφάλαια γνωστικά). The path of knowledge presented in these three works was a progression beginning with ascetic practice (πρακτική) and leading to freedom from the passions (ἀπάθεια) and stillness (ἡσυχία/Κω) which permitted the monk to enter into true contemplation which itself culminated in an unmediated vision of the divine.

<sup>116</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 347-50. A.M. Casiday summarizes the Evagrian system as: "a three-part programme of spiritual development whereby one progresses from ethical and ascetical practices, to a renewed understanding of the universe and its meanings, and thence to the vision of God." Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 36. See also the summary in Evagrius Ponticus, *Ad monachos*, published as *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll, Ancient Christian Writers 59 (New York: Newman Press, 2003), 1-37. With its glossary, tables, and historical background, Harmless' introduction to Evagrius is an essential reference and is relied on heavily in the following discussion.

<sup>117</sup> The best editions of these works are all by Antione and/or Claire Guillaumont: Evagrius Ponticus, Praktikos (Guillaumont edition); Evagrius Ponticus, Gnostikos, published as Le Gnostique: Ou à celui qui est devenu digne de la science, eds. and trans. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, SC 356 (Paris: Cerf, 1989); Evagrius Ponticus, Kephalaia Gnostica, published as Les Six Centuries des Kephalaia Gnostica d'Évagre le Pontique: Édition critique de la version syriaque commune et édition d'une nouvelle version syriaque, intégrale, avec une double traduction française, ed. and trans. Antoine Guillaumont, PO 28.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958). Also relevant to the influence of Evagrius on Philoxenos is Evagrius' On Prayer (Περὶ προσευχής). It is translated from the Greek in Evagrius Ponticus, On Prayer, in Evagrius Ponticus, trans. Augustine Casiday (New York: Routledge, 2006), 185-201. An older English translation of both the Praktikos and On Prayer is found in John Eudes Bamberger, The Praktikos [and] Chapters on Prayer, Cistercian Studies 4 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970). English translations of all three may also be found in Luke Dysinger, "St. Evagrius Ponticus," Saint Andrew's Abbey, http://www. ldysinger.com/Evagrius/00a\_start.htm. Unfortunately, Dysinger relies too much on a Greek retroversion rather than on the Syriac. For further scholarship on Evagrius see the excellent bibliography compiled by Joel Kalvesmaki to serve as a supplement to the Clavis Patrum Graecorum. Joel Kalvesmaki, "Evagrius Ponticus: Monastic Theologian," http://www.kalvesmaki.com/EvagPont/. There is also a noteworthy study and translation of the Greek Evagrian corpus by Sinkewicz. Robert E. Sinkewicz, Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Given the gnomic quality of Evagrius' writing (which tended to be in the form of short sentence-long chapters or κεφάλαια), it will be useful for our understanding of Philoxenos' appropriation of Evagrius to note briefly here some of the key terms which served as signals of the various stages in the Evagrian system. In this regard, we may treat each part of his trilogy as a separate unit and then return to a consideration of how Evagrius himself summarized his system of spiritual progress.

#### THE PRAKTIKOS

Of the three works in the trilogy, we begin with the *Praktikos*. As the Greek title reveals, this work is primarily concerned with the "practice" of ascesis and the fruits that can be born from it. In the Syriac translations, the understanding that ascetic practice would bear spiritual fruit was played out in that *praktikē* (πρακτική) was translated with κουίας (toiling, as a farmer working the land) further bringing out the agricultural metaphor. For Evagrius, this stage was summed up as "keeping the commandments" for the sake of achieving "purity of the soul":

*Praktikos* 78: *Praktikē* is the spiritual method for purifying the passionate part of the soul. 119

*Kephalaia Gnostica* 6:34: By the *praktikē* [Syr. toiling] of His commands, God clothes us with the seal of His purity... <sup>120</sup>

 $<sup>^{118}</sup>$  I am indebted to Emmanuel Papoutsakis for first explaining this and other nuances of Syriac monastic vocabulary to me.

<sup>119</sup> Πραπτική ἐστι μέθοδος πνευματική τὸ παθητικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκκαθαίρουσα. Evagrius Ponticus, Praktikos (Guillaumont edition), 666. The Praktikos did survive in Syriac, but no critical text has yet been established. For our purposes here, the Greek text is sufficient. The English translation is my own.

The function of *praktikē* was catharsis. Through ascesis and obedience to the commandments, the monk was purified. This purity was the first step in being able to draw near to God.

Evagrius warned the monk who undertook *praktikē* to expect substantial spiritual opposition. He categorized this opposition within a demonology of eight evil thoughts opposed to the monk's obedience and purity. He enumerated these as gluttony (γαστομιαργία), impurity/fornication (πορνεία), avarice (φιλαργυρία), sadness (λύπη), anger (ὀργή), *acedia*/lethargy (ἀκηδία), vainglory (κενοδοξία), and pride (ὑπερηφάνία). 121 It was these evil thoughts, or demons as they are styled later in the text, that waged war against the monk. Moreover, as Evagrius was quick to note, this was a battle that took place in the mind:

*Praktikos* 48: The demons strive against men of the world chiefly through their deeds, but in the case of monks for the most part by means of thoughts, since the desert deprives them of such affairs. 122

<sup>120 .</sup> האסתבטאה ביג באר א ביג אורים אורים ווישט ביג באר ביג ביג באר בי

<sup>121</sup> Όκτώ είσι πάντες οἱ γενικώτατοι λογισμοὶ ἐν οἶς περιέχεται πᾶς λογισμός. Πρῶτος ὁ τῆς γαστριμαργίας, καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν ὁ τῆς πορνείας τρίτος ὁ τῆς φιλαργυρίας τέταρτος ὁ τῆς λύπης πέμπτος ὁ τῆς όργῆς ἔκτος ὁ τῆς ἀκηδίας ἔβδομος ὁ τῆς κενοδοξίας ὄγδοος ὁ τῆς ὑπερηφανίας. Τούτους πάντας παρενοχλεῖν μὲν τῆ ψυχῆ ἢ μὴ παρενοχλεῖν, τῶν οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἐστι τὸ δὲ χρονίζειν αὐτοὺς ἢ μὴ χρονίζειν, ἣ πάθη κινεῖν ἢ μὴ κινεῖν, τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν. Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 506, 508.

<sup>122</sup> Τοῖς μὲν κοσμικοῖς οἱ δαίμονες διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων μᾶλλον παλαίουσι, τοῖς δὲ μοναχοῖς ὡς ἐπὶ πλεῖστον διὰ τῶν λογισμῶν πραγμάτων γὰρ διὰ τὴν ἐρημίαν ἐστἑρηνται... Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 608. English translation from Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, in *The Praktikos [and] Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, Cistercian Studies 4 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 29.

It is difficult to overemphasize the extent to which this spiritual battle with demons was central to the *Praktikos*. Of the one hundred chapters in the work, sixty-seven mention demons. The proper means of combat against these demons, as laid out in the *Praktikos* and even more in Evagrius' *Antirrhetikos*, was to reply to their temptations with scripture. The application of scripture passages was formulaic and at times detached from the actual meaning of the text. The passages were selected to serve easily and quickly as retorts (*antirrhetikoi*) to demonic overtures. It is perhaps best to understand Evagrius' use of scripture against demons as akin to the direct topical application of an antidote rather than as reasoned reflection or contemplation on a Biblical text.

### THE GNOSTIKOS

The place for reflection and contemplation is found in the second part of Evagrius' trilogy, the *Gnostikos*. In this middle work, which is the shortest of the three, Evagrius gave instructions on how the monk who had progressed to purity might begin to teach younger

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> See the discussion of this in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 327-329; David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 48-77.

<sup>124</sup> On the Antirrhetikos, see Michael O'Laughlin, "The Bible, Demons and the Desert: Evaluating the Antirrheticus of Evagrius-Ponticus," Studia Monastica 34, 2 (1992): 201-15. The Syriac text is found in Evagrius Ponticus, Gnostikos (Syriac Version, MS BL Add. 14578), published as Gnosticus addit. 14578, in Euagrius Ponticus, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Frankenberg, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse n.s. 13,2 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912), 472-547.

monks and also undertake contemplation (θεωρία/κόπο) of the divine. The practice of contemplation was twofold, beginning first with contemplation of the physical universe (γνῶσις φυσική) and then moving to the direct mystical apprehension of God in the Trinity (θεολογία). 127

The final stage of contemplation was based on having successfully completed the combat against the demons and having brought one's soul to a passionless state. In the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, Evagrius explained:

*Kephalaia Gnostica* 1:65: In the increase of the understandings of the creatures there are works and combats. But in contemplation of the Holy Trinity is peace and an ineffable quietude.<sup>128</sup>

In this chapter, Evagrius also made another distinction. Just as the *praktikē* had been a matter of the created order, so the contemplation of the *gnostikē* was a purely spiritual affair in which the mind (voữs/ܐܘܝܩ), which was itself spiritual, received spiritual knowledge of God. In an early chapter of the *Gnostikos* he wrote:

Gnostikos 4: The knowledge that reaches us from external [things] tries by means of logoi to indirectly teach material [things]. However the [knowledge] which by God's

<sup>126</sup> See Gnostikos 3: Γνωστικός δὲ ὁ ἀλὸς μὲν λόγον ἐπέχων τοῖς ἀκαθάφτοις, φωτὸς δὲ τοῖς καθαφοῖς Evagrius Ponticus, Gnostikos (Guillaumont edition), 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> See the tables in Christoph Joest, "Die Bedeutung von Akedia und Apatheia bei Evagrios Pontikos," *Studia Monastica* 35, 1 (1993): 16; Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 346.

יבו אסמבלא הבי אסמבלא היז איז ביומאט פעיבר מספיר איז איז א מספיר איז איז א מספיר א אואר ביוער ביינער ביינ

grace comes about inside [of us] directly presents matters to the mind; and in beholding them, the *nous* welcomes their *logoi*. 129

Divine knowledge was not mediated through the created order as human knowledge was.

Instead, in the Evagrian system God was known directly through grace and without intermediaries.

In addition to the qualitative difference between the two kinds of knowledge,

Evagrius stressed the difference in the means of acquiring the two and their limits. The

spiritual knowledge of the monk was arrived at through stillness (ἡσυχία/κΔΣ), silence

(ἄροητον), and awareness of the limits of human knowledge. As he explained in the *Gnostikos*:

*Gnostikos* 41: Every proposition has a predicate or a genus, or a distinction, or a species, or a property, or an accident, or that which is composed of these things. But on the subject of the Holy Trinity, nothing of what has been said [here] is admissible. Let the ineffable be adored in silence!<sup>130</sup>

In particular, Evagrius put a heavy emphasis on guiding the monk from consideration of the created world to contemplation of the divine, a matter which was qualitatively different. He warned:

<sup>129</sup> Ἡ μὲν ἔξωθεν ἡμῖν συμβαίνουσα γνῶσις, διὰ τῶν λόγων ὑποδεικνὑειν πειρᾶται τὰς ὕλας ἡ δὲ ἐκ Θεοῦ χάριτος ἐγγινομένη, αὐτοψεὶ τῆ διανοία παρίστησι τὰ πράγματα, πρὸς ἃ βλέπων ὁ νοῦς, τοὺς αὐτῶν λόγους προσίεται Evagrius Ponticus, Gnostikos (Guillaumont edition), 92. English adapted from Dysinger: Evagrius Ponticus. Gnostikos, or One who is Worthy of Knowledge, trans. Luke Dysinger, Saint Andrew's Abbey, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/02\_Gno-Keph/01\_gnost.htm#\_ftn1.

<sup>130</sup> Πᾶσα πρότασις ἢ γένος ἔχει κατηγορούμενον, ἢ διαφοράν, ἢ εἶδος, ἢ ἴδιον, ἢ συμβεβηκός, ἢ τὸ ἐκ τούτων συγκείμενον οὐδὲν δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγίας Τριάδος τῶν εἰρημένων ἔστι λαβεῖν. Σιωπῆ προσκυνείσθω τὸ ἄρρητον. Evagrius Ponticus, Gnostikos (Guillaumont edition), 166. English adapted from Dysinger: Evagrius Ponticus. Gnostikos (Dysinger translation).

*Gnostikos* 27: Do not speak about God, without [careful] consideration; nor should you ever define the Deity: for it is only of things which [are made or] are composite that there can be definitions.<sup>131</sup>

In short, Evagrius' system of gnosis was an intellectual exit strategy. Just as the monk had fled human society to the desert, Evagrius hoped to provide a path through which the monk could exit human thought with its limits and definitions, entering into pure contemplation of God.

Although Evagrius was trying to promote an epistemology in the *Gnostikos*, we must bear in mind that it was still ascetic in genre in addition to imparting a philosophical system. In the Syriac manuscript tradition the *Gnostikos* tended to circulate as part of the *Praktikos* rather than as part of the *Kephalaia Gnostica*. In accord with the paranaetic tone, we find that Evagrius included spiritual warnings for the monk in the text. He noted that contemplation was subject to its own temptations, and it was inappropriate for those who had not yet made progress in *praktikē*. He admonished:

Gnostikos 35: Persuade the monks who come to you to speak concerning the monastic schema of the fear of God and the ascetic life ( Thaihan Kana), but not [to speak] concerning the doctrine of divine knowledge, unless one is found who is able to speak about it.

Gnostikos 43: The sin of the *gnostikos* is false knowledge of things or their meanings, which is born from some passion or because we are not investigating (ححمد المعاملة) things for a good reason. 133

<sup>131</sup> Μὴ ἀπερισκέπτως θεολογήσης, μηδέποτε ὁριζου τὸ θεῖον. τῶν γὰρ [γεγονότων καὶ] συνθέτων εἰσὶν οἱ ὅροι. Evagrius Ponticus, *Gnostikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 132. English adapted from Dysinger: Evagrius Ponticus. *Gnostikos (Dysinger translation)*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Indeed, in some Syriac manuscripts it is enumerated as a continuation of the *Praktikos*. Evagrius Ponticus, *Gnostikos (Guillaumont edition*), 18.

אפים רשר בייניא נאף אין דייניאי ובן מי כך אמיבא נניקף אושא סוניםבא נייניא אפיני נאך איניאל אושא סוניםבא בון אי ניביקניטלא נגרווף ביבאי טוא כן מוריז נאביא נארייאי איזי באר איזי באר בייניאליטלא נארייאי

We should not be surprised to find this withholding of knowledge from those who were not yet ready. The progression of knowledge with its levels of initiation was essential to the structure of the Evagrian trilogy. Indeed, Evagrius stressed this aspect in the very beginning of the *Praktikos*. In the prefatory letter, he explained that he had ordered his work to allow the monk to progress through the various stages, but:

So as 'not to give what is holy to the dogs or to cast our pearls before swine' some of these matters will be kept in concealment and others alluded to only obscurely, but yet so as to keep them quite clear to those who walk along in the same path."<sup>134</sup>

The path led from the first spiritual battles of the *Praktikos*, to the initial training in contemplation and teaching in the *Gnostikos*, to the ultimate divine vision in the *Kephalaia Gnostica*.

#### KEPHALAIA GNOSTICA

In the first two volumes of his trilogy, Evagrius kept his system veiled from "dogs" and "swine." In the third and final section, however, he began to lay out his path to divine knowledge in full. As the *Praktikos* was concerned with "practice," so the *Kephalaia Gnostica* were primarily concerned with "theory" or contemplation (θεωρία/ κίακδ). It should be noted that the *Kephalaia Gnostica* were the part of Evagrius' work which was most heavily

מר רלמם ביז רלול ז רלם זה ישיטר רנלם מזה רלול שייי ישרא ישרא משה ראם איז של ישרא מלה מיי ישרא ישרא האול איז מר ימשה רלולם מלה מר ימשה לאים איז מר ימשה לאים איז מר ימשה רלול איז מר ימשה לאים איז מר ימשה לאים איז מר ישרא לאיז מר ישרא מר ישרא לאיז מר ישרא מר ישר מר ישרא מר ישר מר ישרא מר ישר מר ישרא מר ישרא מר ישר מר ישרא מר ישר מר ישר מר ישרא מר י

<sup>134</sup> καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐπικρύψαντες, τὰ δὲ συσκιάσαντες, ἴνα μὴ δῶμεν τὰ ἄγια τοῖς κυσὶ μηδὲ βάλωμεν τοὺς μαργαρίτας ἔμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων. ἔσται δὲ ταῦτα ἐμφανῆ τοῖς εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ ἴχνος αὐτοῖς Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 492, 494. English translation from Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Bamberger translation)*, 15.

emended along theological lines when translated into Syriac. Accordingly, our study here becomes decidedly that of the reception of Evagrius in Syriac (S<sub>1</sub>), rather than of Evagrius' system *per se*. For understanding Evagrian influences on Philoxenos, three general themes of this lengthy work are worth noting.<sup>135</sup> The first is the repeated emphasis which Evagrius put on contemplation and the resultant knowledge of God—not only as the zenith of monastic life but even as the end of all creation:

*Kephalaia Gnostica* 1:85: Everything that came into being, came into being for the sake of the knowledge of God; but everything that came into being for the sake of something else is less than that for which it came into being. For this reason the knowledge of God is superior to everything, because everything was created for its sake. <sup>136</sup>

Progress toward the knowledge of God was the goal which unified all three works of the Evagrian trilogy.

True to his own advice in the *Gnostikos*, Evagrius was circumspect and elusive about the content of this knowledge. In the most general terms, he identified it simply as "contemplation of the Holy Trinity":

*Kephalaia Gnostica* 2:63: Among the [types of] knowledges there are those that are without matter and those known to be in matter. But the knowledge of the Holy Trinity is above all of them. <sup>137</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> The Kephalaia Gnostica as a whole is six times longer than the Praktikos.

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Or in more particular terms, Evagrius explained knowledge of the trinity in terms of a divine vision. For example he noted:

Kephalaia Gnostica 3:30: The spiritual mind is the vision of the Holy Trinity. <sup>138</sup> In another work, On Prayer, Evagrius elaborated even further, equating this divine vision with prayer:

On Prayer 36: Prayer is the mind's ascent to God. 139

On Prayer 61: If you are a theologian, you will pray truly, and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian. 140

On Prayer 113: Through true prayer, the monk becomes 'equal to the angels' yearning to 'see the face of the Father who is in heaven.' 141

On Prayer 113 was a summation of both parts of Evagrius' system. Through *praktikē*, the monk approached the angelic state, through contemplation (θεωρία/κίσοκ) the monk drew near to see God through divine vision.

Beyond his metaphor of divine vision (and also of divine light), Evagrius limited his discussion of divine knowledge. This is in part because his understanding of divine knowledge was that it was ineffable. As he explained in the *Kephalaia Gnostica*:

<sup>139</sup> Προσευχή ἐστιν ἀνάβασις νοῦ πρὸς Θεόν. Evagrius Ponticus, On Prayer, published as De Oratione, in S.P.N. Nili abbatis opera...omnia, ed. and trans. J.-P. Migne, PG 79 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1863), text from TLG 4110.024. Translation from Casiday, Evagrius Ponticus, 190. Only the first 32 chapters of On Prayer are extant in Syriac. See Irénée Hausherr, "Le 'De Oratione' d'Évagre le Pontique en syriaque et en arabe," Orientalia Christiana Periodica 5 (1939): 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Εἰ θεολόγος εἶ, προσεύξη ἀληθῶς, καὶ εἰ ἀληθῶς προσεύξη, θεολόγος εἶ. Evagrius Ponticus, *On Prayer* (PG 79), text from TLG 4110.024. Translation from Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 192.

<sup>141</sup> Ισάγγελος γίνεται μοναχὸς διὰ τῆς ἀληθοῦς προσευχῆς, 'επιποθῶν ἰδεῖν τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ Πατρὸς τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Evagrius Ponticus, *On Prayer (PG 79)*, text from TLG 4110.024. Translation from Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 198.

Kephalaia Gnostica 2:11: ...God is not understood, nor is his dwelling place. <sup>142</sup>
Kephalaia Gnostica 5:26: The one who has not seen God cannot speak about Him. <sup>143</sup>
In addition to ineffable, Divine knowledge was also infinite. One could always learn more about God. From the coincidence of infinity with ineffability, an interesting paradox arose. In Evagrius' system, knowledge of God and human ignorance of God were both infinite:

Kephalaia Gnostica 1:71: The end of natural knowledge is knowledge of the Holy Unity, but—as the fathers say—there is no limit to incomprehensibility [S2: ignorance]...<sup>144</sup>

Ultimately, there was nothing more that Evagrius could say—after arriving at "incomprehensibility without end" one had reached the esoteric extreme of the Evagrian system.<sup>145</sup>

From this infinite progression in divine knowledge, we now turn to the general structure of Evagrius' ascetic and gnostic system. Evagrius himself provided several concise summaries. In the prologue of *Praktikos*, he noted:

The fear of God strengthens faith, my son, and continence in turn strengthens this fear. Patience and hope make this latter virtue solid beyond all shaking and they also give birth to apatheia. Now this apatheia has a child called agape who keeps the door to

<sup>142</sup> ישה בא באל באל באליה... Evagrius Ponticus, Kephalaia Gnostica (Guillaumont edition), 64. This is the reading of S<sub>1</sub>.

<sup>143 \*</sup> באה בא באה בא באה בא באה בא Evagrius Ponticus, Kephalaia Gnostica (Guillaumont edition), 186. This is the reading of S<sub>1</sub>. Interestingly the text of S<sub>2</sub> of this chapter is very close to the optic vocabulary used by Philoxenos discussed in chapter one.

 $<sup>^{144}</sup>$  יראסוביואס אלא היז איביב האמים אסט העדיא איני אראסוב אינים אסט אביז איני באנב אראסט איני אראסט אבין איני איני באנב אראסט איני אראסט איני איני Evagrius Ponticus, Kephalaia Gnostica (Guillaumont edition), 50. This is the reading of  $S_1$ .

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> On this phrase see Irénée Hausherr, "Ignorance infinie ou science infinie?," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 25 (1959): 44-52.

deep knowledge of the physical universe. After this knowledge follow theology and the final beatific. 146

### Or put otherwise:

Praktikos 81: Agape is the offspring of apatheia. Apatheia is the flower of praktikē. Praktikē consists in keeping the commandments. The custodian of these commandments is the fear of God which is in turn the offspring of straight faith...<sup>147</sup>

As we shall see, this progression from "straight faith" to "keeping the commandments" was integral to Philoxenos' own ascetic system.

### "JUST AS IS SAID BY ONE OF THE FATHERS": PHILOXENOS AND EVAGRIUS

We are now in a position to identify Philoxenos' citation of "one of the fathers" in the postscript from the *Letter to Patricius*. <sup>148</sup> The father in question is indeed Evagrius Ponticus. <sup>149</sup> In fact, Evagrius is quoted outright twice in the letter (though never named). <sup>150</sup> Moreover, allusions to Evagrius and uses of Evagrian terminology abound in the letter. <sup>151</sup>

<sup>146</sup> τὴν πίστιν, ὧ τέκνα, βεβαιοῖ ὁ φόβος ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τοῦτον πάλιν ἐγκράτεια, ταύτην δὲ ἀκλινῆ ποιοῦσιν ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἐλπίς, ἀφ' ὧν τίκτεται ἀπάθεια, ἦς ἔγγονον ἡ ἀγάπη, ἀγάπη δὲ θύρα γνώσεως φυσικῆς ἢν διαδέχεται θεολογία καὶ ἡ ἐσχάτη μακαριότης. Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 492. English translation adapted from Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Bamberger translation)*, 14.

<sup>147</sup> Απαθείας ἔγγονον ἀγὰπη · ἀπάθεια δέ ἐστιν ἄνθος τῆς πραπτικῆς · πρακτικὴν δὲ συνίστησιν ἡ τἡρησις τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων δὲ φύλαξ ὁ φόβος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅστις γἐννημα τῆς ὀρθῆς ἐστι πίστεως · πίστις δὲ ἐστιν ἐνδιάθετον ἀγαθόν, ἥτις ἐνυπάρχειν πέφυκε καὶ τοῖς μηδέπω πεπιστευκόσι Θεῷ. Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 670. English translation adapted from Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Bamberger translation)*, 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> See note 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> The quotation appears to be a conflation of *Praktikos* 78 and 81. Cf. Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos (Guillaumont edition)*, 666-671. See both of these passages above in notes 119 and 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Patricius (Longer Recension), 812, 872.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> An introduction to Philoxenos' reception of Evagrius is found in Paul Harb, "L'Attitude de Philoxène de Mabboug à l'égard de la spiritualité « savante » d'Évagre le Pontique," in *Mémorial G. Khouri-Sarkis* 

For example, Paul Harb notes that the transliteration of the Greek word for "contemplation" (θεωρία/κοία) occurs 93 times in the letter! The Letter to Patricius is not the only work showing clear dependence on Evagrian concepts. In the Book of Sentences and the Discourses, Evagrian terminology is present in a similar density. 153

### EVAGRIANA SYRIACA

It is essential to recall that Philoxenos primarily knew the works of Evagrius via the emended Syriac translation (S<sub>1</sub>). Accordingly, his adoption of Evagrius' ascetic schema is generally without criticism (though he avoided mentioning Evagrius by name). <sup>154</sup>
Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to answer the question of when Philoxenos first had access to S<sub>1</sub>. <sup>155</sup> In his ground-breaking work on the two translations, Antoine Guillaumont suggested that perhaps Philoxenos and the Mabbug scriptorium were

(1898-1968), fondateur et directeur de l'Orient syrien, 1956-1967, Revue d'études et de recherches sur les Églises de langue syriaque, ed. F. Graffin (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1969), 135-55. This article is a summary of Harb's thesis: Paul Harb, "La Vie spirituelle selon Philoxène de Mabbūg" (Ph.D. diss., L'Université de Strasbourg, 1968).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Harb, "Philoxène à l'égard d'Évagre," 136.

<sup>153</sup> Harb, "Philoxène à l'égard d'Évagre," 135-36. See also the discussion in Irénée Hausherr, "Contemplation et sainteté: Une remarquable mise au point par Philoxène de Mabboug († 523)," Revue D'Ascétique et de Mystique 4 (1933): 174ff.

<sup>154</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to Abraham and Orestes (Frothingham edition), 37; Taeke Jansma, "Philoxenos' Letter to Abraham and Orestes Concerning Stephen Bar Gudaili: Some Proposals with Regard to the Correction of the Syriac Text and the English Translation," Le Muséon 87, 1-2 (1974): 79-86. On Evagrius' anonymity in Philoxenos see Antoine Guillaumont, Les 'Képhalaia gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens, Patristica Sorbonensia 5 (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962), 209 n. 34.

<sup>155</sup> Robin Darling Young, "Evagrius in Edessa: Philoxenos of Mabbug's Use of Evagrius in the Letter to Patricius," in "To Train His Soul in Books": Essays on Syrian Asceticism in Honor of Sidney H. Griffith, eds. Robin Darling Young and Monica Blanchard (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming). Further exploration of this topic would be useful.

responsible for the production of  $S_1$ . <sup>156</sup> John Watt has revised Guillaumont's interpretation to suggest that  $S_1$  predated Philoxenos and was perhaps used by him as a student at the School of the Persians. <sup>157</sup> Regardless of the origins of  $S_1$ , it is enough to note that Philoxenos' dependence on Evagrius is evident in many of his works, both ascetic and polemical. <sup>158</sup>

### THE APPEAL OF CONTEMPLATION

We have glimpsed the spiritual fruits that the Evagrian system had to offer the monks who followed its path to perfection and divine vision. In short, Evagrian gnosis was a form of supercharged monasticism. Contemplation offered the ultimate exit from the impurity of the world, allowing the mind (which was essentially spiritual) to escape the physical realm and associate with its own kind. For a monk such as Patricius who found the physical aspects of ascesis toilsome, contemplation stood out as an alternate renunciation offering superior rewards with its divine vision. The appeal of the Evagrian divine vision was no doubt highly attractive to those undertaking the monastic life. Both unmediated and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Guillaumont, Évagre et l'histoire de l'Origénisme, 200-213. It is tempting to see the work of the Mabbug scriptorium in this project, but the evidence is far from sufficient.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> J.W. Watt, "Philoxenus and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius' *Centuries*," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980): 65-81; J.W. Watt, "The Syriac Adapter of Evagrius' Centuries," *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982): 1388-1395.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> As we shall see in subsequent chapters, there is even perhaps some dependence on Evagrian epistemology in the *Memre against Habib*, though considerably more muted than in the works mentioned above.

<sup>159</sup> So Harmless summarizes: "From these passages, we can piece together Evagrius's basic view. During pure prayer, the purified mind sees itself, its truest self, its true state. And the self that it sees is luminous. But that luminosity which permits it to see itself is the divine light. In seeing itself as luminosity, as light like sapphire or sky blue, the mind discovers its Godlikeness. At the same time, it sees and knows by seeing-indirectly, as in a mirror-the uncreated, immaterial light that God is." Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 354.

infinite, it provided an experience of the divine which, at least in its rhetoric, was unrivalled. In short, the Evagrian system offered an anchor and focal point for monastic life.

As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, Philoxenos was deeply influenced by Evagrius' system and epistemology. In his ascetic writings, such as the *Discourses*, Philoxenos adapted the progression of Evagrius' trilogy to fit with similar Syriac monastic traditions of spiritual perfection. He also championed contemplation and the direct access to the divine promised in Evagrius' system of gnosis. Evagrian epistemological and ascetic concepts were integral to Philoxenos' own vision for Christian life and practice. They were so deeply held that they provided the theological structure not only for Philoxenos' ascetic system but also his polemics.

### **CONCLUSION**

As each of the subsequent chapters of this study explores the contexts of Christian practice which shaped Philoxenos' theology, it will be useful to keep in mind that Philoxenos understood the relationship between practice and knowledge of God through Evagrius. He followed Evagrius' two-fold system of spiritual progess. The monk defeated demons and controlled his passions through ascetic practice (praktikē/πραπιπή). Reaching stillness through correct practice, the monk then turned to "theory" or contemplation (theōria/θεωρία). Eventually through progress in spiritual knowledge, the monk arrived at direct access to God through what Evagrius termed as divine vision.

This Evagrian paradigm was foundational to Philoxenos' approach to divine knowledge. Neither Evagrius nor Philoxenos assigned a role to doctrinal speculation at

either of the two steps which led to divine knowledge. Starting out to undertake *praktikē*, the monk was not worthy to discuss doctrine but was to focus on obedience and the fear of God. Upon reaching the second stage, *theōria*, the monk could contemplate on scripture and doctrine (such as the Trinity), but ultimately his goal was to move beyond words (hence beyond doctrinal theology) to the ineffable knowledge of God, a *theologia* which Evagrian described as wordless and imageless prayer. In short, for both Evagrius and Philoxenos, *praktikē* and *theōria* comprised a system in which knowledge of God was achieved through practice and not doctrinal speculation.

# CHAPTER THREE PROOF TEXTS FOR THE INEFFABLE: ON KNOWING CHRIST THROUGH SCRIPTURE

"The expressions which are said about the faith do not allow commentary..." 160

— Commentary on the Prologue to the Gospel of John

#### INTRODUCTION

In the 819<sup>th</sup> year of Alexander (A.D. 507/508), Polycarp, the chorepiscopus of Mabbug, completed a retranslation of the Syriac New Testament under the direction of Philoxenos.<sup>161</sup> Writing perhaps just before that moment, Philoxenos gave this explanation of the project in his *Commentary on the Prologue to the Gospel of John*:

"Those of old who translated (anx) these scriptures erred in many things, whether willfully or out of ignorance. These errors were not only in what is taught about the *oikonomia* which is in the flesh, but also in the rest of what is written about other doctrines. For this reason we have now taken the trouble to have the holy scriptures of the New Testament translated (anx) anew from Greek into Syriac." <sup>162</sup>

<sup>161</sup> The date of the Philoxenia-sponsored revision of the New Testament is given by Moses of Aggel. Sebastian Brock, "The Resolution of the Philoxenian/Harclean Problem," in *New Testament Textual Criticism. Its Significance for Exegesis. Essays in honor of Bruce M. Metzger*, eds. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 325, n. 2. The deacon Polycarp is credited with the revision. Unfortunately, no manuscripts of the Philoxenian New Testament survive. See the discussion in Günther Zuntz, *The Ancestry of the Harklean New Testament*, British Academy Supplemental Papers 7 (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 12-24; Brock, "Philoxenian/Harclean Problem," 340-343.

<sup>...</sup> הינה הכן סדים בשביאי בירונים בער בריבונים בער איי ווישנים בער בארים בער בארים בער בארים בער בארים בער בארים ב

From this and other comments in his Biblical commentaries, Philoxenos made clear his concern over the misuse of scripture in the Christological disputes. His response to this crisis was to produce not only a fresh translation of the Syriac New Testament, but also lengthy polemical commentaries on portions of Matthew, Luke, and John.

While arguments over interpreting specific scriptural passages had a place in these commentaries, Philoxenos' objection to the dyophysite use of scripture was broader than a matter of conflicting interpretations and competing proof texts. He argued that his opponents were not merely wrong about the meaning of the text; their error lay deeper. Their entire engagement with scripture was misguided, even blasphemous. The conflict over scripture was thus a matter of competing religious practice. How was one to approach the holy books? Philoxenos charged that in their speculative method of commentary (in the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia), the dyophysites had done more than just misread the text. They had impeded the process of simple faith through which scripture delivered the mysteries of the incarnation, an intervention which prevented the acquisition of true spiritual knowledge. Accordingly, when Philoxenos began to write his own commentaries, he did so to advocate an alternative vision of scripture reading. In this approach (inherited in part from Evagrius), reading scripture was a means of first-hand participation in the *vikonomia* of salvation. As an aid to contemplation, scripture directly disclosed the mysteries of the incarnation to the reader. This revelation was not a subject for intellectual inquiry. Like

הבלים אינה אוני באלים ביאים באלים Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 53. English translation of this passage adapted from Brock, "Philoxenian/Harclean Problem," 328. De Halleux has dated the Commentary on the Prologue of John to approximately 505. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 381), xv.

prayer, it was an act of direct communion with God. Reading scripture in this manner was incompatible with the exegetical way in which his opponents used scripture.

This chapter explores the hermeneutic conflict in three steps. It begins by examining the specific polemical and historical setting of Philoxenos' scriptural commentaries and translation project. Then, as a second step, it considers Philoxenos' reasons for commentary writing. Having shown how Philoxenos framed the crux of the debate, the third part of this chapter examines the alternative approach to scripture which he advocated in his commentaries. From this vision of how to read the scriptures, we can begin to put Philoxenos' Christological polemic into context. He sounded an alarm about dyophysite Christology because it threatened to disrupt the simplicity of the faithful and their progress toward true knowledge of the divine. In Philoxenos' opinion, the miaphysite and dyophysite approaches to scripture reflected conflicting ways of knowing God.

## "TO BYPASS EVERY EVIL PATH WHICH LEADS TO ERRONEOUS DOCTRINE": THE SCRIPTORIUM AT MABBUG

In investigating Philoxenos' translation and commentary projects, we are aided by the survival of first hand manuscript evidence, a valuable occurrence which is rare for our period. The first piece is BL Add. 14528. This manuscript is a translation from Greek into Syriac of the Antiochene *Synodicon*, records from several councils including Nicaea and Chalcedon. <sup>163</sup> According to its colophon, this *Synodicon* translation (and perhaps BL Add.

Antiochene Synodicon (BL Add. 14528), in MS BL Add. 14528, fols. 1r-151v. Portions of the manuscript have been translated as Extracts from the Syriac MSS, No. 14,528 etc. in the British Museum, in Syriac Miscellanies; or, Extracts Relating to the First and Second General Councils... trans. Benjamin Harris Cowper (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 5-25, 34-43. After comparison of Cowper's edition with the manuscript, it should be noted that Cowper excluded what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this synodicon, that fact that it

14528 itself) was written in Mabbug in A.D. 501 (A.G. 812). As de Halleux has noted, the translation is noteworthy for its use of several Syriac neo-logisms which were championed in Philoxenos' Christological polemics, such as revised literal translations for ὁμοούσιον, σαρχωθέντα, and ἐνανθρωπήσαντα. 164 According to de Halleux, their appearance in BL Add. 14528 and in Philoxenos' Biblical commentaries of that period marks the earliest systematic use in Syriac literature. 165 De Halleux rightly concluded that Add. 14528 is likely the product of a scriptorium in Mabbug operating under Philoxenos' patronage.

In addition to this *Synodicon*, it is probable that two further products of this same Philoxenian scriptorium survive in British Library. A heavily damaged manuscript, BL Add. 17126, is the sole witness to the largest extant fragments of Philoxenos' *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*. According to its colophon, this manuscript was copied in Mabbug in the

includes the canons of Chalcedon without comment. See also William Wright, Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum: Acquired Since the Year 1838, 3 vols. ([London]: Trustees of the British Museum and Longmans, 1870; reprint, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004.), 2:1030-1032, Item DCCCCVI.

<sup>164</sup> Specifically, de Halleux notes the following shifts in terminology: ὁμοούσιον, which was previously rendered ישׁב בּבּב , is translated אַסְּמָבְּעִי , which was previously rendered בּבְבַ אַבְּעָלְ , which was previously rendered בּבְּבַ , is translated as בּנִבְּעָלָ , and ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, which was previously rendered בּנְבָּעָלָ , is translated as André de Halleux, "La Philoxénienne du symbole," in *Symposium Syriacum 1976*, OCA 205 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1978), 302-303.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> de Halleux, "La philoxénienne du symbole," 307.

<sup>166</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke, in MS BL Add. 17126, fols. 1r-10v, 14r-38v. This manuscript is partially reproduced in Douglas J. Fox, The "Matthew-Luke Commentary" of Philoxenus: Text, Translation, and Critical Analysis (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 50-125. There is also an edited text by Watt: Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 393). The edited text of Watt is to be preferred as Fox has emended his reproduction manuscript without sufficient notice. N.B. folia 35-38 of BL Add. 17126 in Fox's reproduction are in Fox's own hand, not that of the original scribe. Cf. Fox, Matthew-Luke Commentary, 49; André de Halleux, "Le Commentaire de Philoxène sur Matthieu et Luc: Deux éditions récentes," Le Muséon 93, 1-2 (1980): 5-35. It should also be noted that MS BL 17126, fols. 11-13 have been determined to be interpolations which probably belong to a Philoxenian commentary on John if not to BL Add. 14528 itself. The text and de Halleux' review of the arguments are found in de Halleux, "Philoxène: Deux

year A.D. 511 (A.G. 822). The witness of this manuscript is strengthened by BL Add. 14534, which, although undated, is similar in hand and in some orthographic and grammatical peculiarities. <sup>167</sup> BL Add. 14534 is itself the primary witness to Philoxenos' *Commentary on the Prologue of John*. <sup>168</sup> Both of these manuscripts must be very close to the original manuscripts of Philoxenos' commentaries. These commentaries were written circa 505 in conjunction with the Philoxenian-sponsored revision of the New Testament which the Mabbug scriptorium completed in 507/8 (and of which, unfortunately, little of substance survives). <sup>169</sup>

From this body of evidence, we can begin to reconstruct the historical context and chronology of the Mabbug scriptorium which flourished under Philoxenos' leadership in the first decade of the sixth century. A key point in this chronology is the ordination of Flavian as patriarch of Antioch in 498. We have already noted how Flavian's ordination

éditions récentes," 18-26. See also the discussion in Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 393), 9-10; Wright, Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, 2:526, Item DCLXXIV.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), x-xi; Wright, Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, 2:526, Item DCLXXV.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John, in MS BL Add. 14534, fols. 1r-199v.

<sup>169</sup> Polycarp may have also translated the so-called Euthalian prologue to the Pauline Epistles in that same year. Brock, "Philoxenian/Harclean Problem," 325, n. 2. Regarding the Euthalian prologue, Brock has identified an authentic Philoxenian version surviving in an eighth-century East (!) Syrian manuscript (BL Add. 7157) and also some excerpts preserved under the name "Of the Holy Philoxenos: the sayings used by Paul (derived) from pagan wisemen and from unkown books" in a ninth-century manuscript (BL Add. 17193). Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Euthalian Material and the Philoxenian Version of the New-Testament," *Zeitschrift Fur Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Alteren Kirche* 70, 1-2 (1979): 120, 124-25. On the date of Philoxenos' commentaries, see Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 393)*, 13-14; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 381)*, xv. On the other hand, Fox wants to put the commentaries a bit earlier in the pre-Flavian era of calm in the Antiochene patriarchate which lasted until the death of Patriarch Palladius in 498. The difficulty with Fox's view is that it would increase the length of lag time between Philoxenos' use of drafts of the New Testament revision and its final release in 508. It seems unlikely that the revision would be finished enough to be used regularly and in a uniform manner in 498 but still not be completed for another decade. Cf. Fox, *Matthew-Luke Commentary*, 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Much of the work of chronology has already been done in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 49-76.

tipped the precarious balance of power in the Diocese of the Oriens toward the supporters of Chalcedon. Philoxenos took up the leadership of the non-Chalcedonian opposition and begun waging a decade-long campaign which led to Flavian's deposition in 512. Besides this anti-Chalcedonian "western front", Philoxenos was also constantly on guard on the "eastern front" against the increasing organization of the dyophysites in Persia. Himself of Persian origin, Philoxenos may have been influential in the closure (on charges of heresy in 489) of the ascetic academy in which he had first been trained, the School of the Persians in Edessa. Similarly, there is epistolary evidence for his support of miaphysite missionary activity among the Armenian and Persian dyophysites following the Roman-Persian peace of 505.

Thus, the first decade of the sixth century was one of pressing theological conflict on all sides for the bishop of Mabbug. Although already a prolific author of Christological polemic, Philoxenos took up a new strategy in the theological battles of the early 500s—Biblical commentary. <sup>174</sup> In doing so, he turned to attack what he saw as a root of dyophysite heresy: troublesome interpretations of the incarnation grounded in speculative and faulty

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> On his relationship with Simeon of Beth Arsham see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> I follow the usage of Adam Becker in designating the school at this stage, "The School of the Persians." Becker, *School of Nisibis*, 42. See his excellent re-evaluation of the school and its closure. Becker, *School of Nisibis*, 41-76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> For Philoxenos' enduring influence in Armenia see Peter S. Cowe, "Philoxenos of Mabbug and the Synod of Manazkert," *ARAM* 5, 1-2 (1993); de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 64. On the war see Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, passim.

<sup>174</sup> Of course, Philoxenos did not abandon the proven polemical genres which he knew well. His commentaries were followed very quickly by his most elaborate theological work, *The Book of Sentences*—a highly refined rebuttal to the speculative theology of his Christological opponents: de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 245.

exegesis. Already in his *Phenqitho against Habib* (480s), Philoxenos had lamented how easily his opponents misinterpreted the words of scripture and of the Nicene Creed:

For also the holy scriptures, although there is one point of their words and their whole proclamation aims at one truth, everyone understands their words as he wishes and pulls the divine phrases toward the passions of his own opinion, but the scriptures are not to blame for this.... rather the evilness of the heretics is responsible. <sup>175</sup>

As an alternative to what he saw as the misreadings and misleadings of his opponents, Philoxenos sought to lay out a straight path for the readers of his commentary and revised New Testament. In the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, he envisioned the right use of scripture this way:

It is well known that life follows faith, if that faith follows scripture in a straight manner and does not change in any way either the reading of the word, or its force, or its interpretation. And, just as the senses are accustomed to follow after sensory things, and also thoughts after intellectual things, so it is right for faith to agree in everything with scripture, lest it turn astray to the right or the left.... Thus its foot is able to bypass every evil path which leads to erroneous doctrine and to proceed without error on the roadway of the king upon which the holy statements of the prophets, apostles, and evangelists are placed as mile markers and road signs. <sup>176</sup>

Scripture was the guide of faith, but its power to guide was threatened by misinterpretation.

Philoxenos sought to safeguard the power of scripture with his commentaries.

## "SENDING FORTH BLASPHEMY...UNDER THE PRETEXT OF COMMENTARY": PHILOXENOS AND THE PROBLEM OF COMMENTARY

We may analyze Philoxenos' choice to write commentaries on three levels. On one level, Philoxenos set his scriptorium to work to resolve several shortcomings of Syriac theology which he had encountered as he navigated the Christological disputes emanating from both the Greek and Syriac speaking churches. In addition to this personal concern, Philoxenos sought to combat the established authority of previous commentators, such as Theodore of Mopsuestia. Finally, as we shall see, Philoxenos had moral and spiritual concerns about the act of commentary; ironically these concerns led him to express himself in "commentaries" as well.

### "NOT THE CUSTOM OF OUR SYRIAC LANGUAGE"

On a personal level, it seems that Philoxenos' involvement in Christological polemic (both in Antioch and in Constantinople) had led to an increasing dissatisfaction with Syriac as an imprecise language of theological expression. Already such a concern was latent in the *Phenqitho against Habib* where Philoxenos occasionally noted the possibility for divergence in terminology between Greek and Syriac. <sup>177</sup> By comparing the *Phenqitho against Habib* with Philoxenos' later works, Lucas Van Rompay has demonstrated how over a period of almost four decades, Philoxenos found that "in the controversy over Nestorianism and Chalcedonianism, the categories and concepts of early Syriac theology gradually proved

<sup>177</sup> For example he tried to assert the unity of Syriac and Greek Christologic terminology against the claims of Habib: "This phrase of mixture and mingling is found in all the books of the fathers, in Aramaic and in Greek." במלבים באלבים באלבים באלבים באלבים באלבים באלבים Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (VI-VIII), 692, 8\\$58.

insufficient and in need of replacement."<sup>178</sup> Ultimately, Philoxenos distanced himself from Ephrem's vocabulary and traditional Syriac terminology for the incarnation. Writing at the end of his life, Philoxenos noted: "... it is not the custom of our Syriac language to express itself in the strict phrases which are spoken among the Greeks concerning the divine inhomination and the incomprehensible union."<sup>179</sup>

This discontent with Syriac *vis-à-vis* Greek found its first expression in the translation projects of the Mabbug scriptorium. Indeed, de Halleux has argued convincingly that Philoxenos' efforts to import Greek theological idioms into Syriac may have begun with his commissioning of a retranslation of the Nicene and Constantinopolitan creeds (the Antiochene *Synodicon*) which then led to the re-translation of the New Testament. Philoxenos' frustrations were certainly evident throughout his commentaries. For example, in the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, he complained:

For we desire to shame the one who translated [the older *Peshitta* translation] because more than the truth, he preferred to put the words which he thought were appropriate for the Syriac language or which he thought proper for God—as if he knew better than Him which words were appropriate for Him!<sup>181</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Van Rompay, "Ephrem in Philoxenus." See also Sebastian Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. Nina G. Garsoïan (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 20.

<sup>179</sup> ഫ്ര രർക്ക് രിമ്മ ഡെക്ക് ലാവരെ പ്ര രാജ്ച് രാജ്ച് രാജ്ച് രാജ്ച് വര് രാജ്ച് വര് രാജ്ച് Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of Senun (CSCO 231), 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> de Halleux, "La philoxénienne du symbole," 302-303.

Commenting on the phrase from Hebrews 5:7, "ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ" ("in the days of his flesh"), Philoxenos pointed out the inherent danger of such apparent carelessness in translation:

...in place of this they translated (area) "when He was clothed in the flesh," and instead of Paul, they inclined to the position of Nestorius who cast the body onto the Word as one does a garment onto an ordinary body, or as purple is put on kings. 182

Mistranslation in the *Peshitta* gave a foothold to the dyophysites and put Philoxenos at a rhetorical disadvantage. Accordingly, Philoxenos' dissatisfaction with previous poor translations can be understood as his personal frustration at trying to write Syriac polemic on themes determined by Greek theology and drawn from the Greek New Testament.<sup>183</sup>

of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 392), 19, Fragment 14. Watt notes that this fragment is not from BL Add. 17126, but is preserved in George of Be'eltan's Commentary on the Gospels.

<sup>183</sup> There is an infamous passage where Philoxenos' own lack of facility in Greek leads him to argue the opposite of what he intends when appealing to the Greek of Matthew 1. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 381)*, 43. See de Halleux's short list of similar erroneous translations in Philoxenos' work. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 123-124.

### "THE INTERPRETER"

Philoxenos' decision to write in the genre of commentary must also be understood within its Antiochene social and cultural context. The decision to call his works a "commentary" (<a href="#">Commentary</a>" (<a href="#">Commentary</a>") (<

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> So reads the colophon of BL Add. 17126, which must have been written with Philoxenos' approval since it was written in his scriptorium: המשבש כא המשבא הנשבש הדישה אווי איז א המשבא הוא בשלבא הוא השבש איז המשבא הוא השבש איז המשבא הוא בשלבא مورياها علم حلح حمد بمتوحم ومعمه بمقرياهم حله ولممه بحديد لعبادهده وسع בבס ב. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 392), 93 n. 4. A brief excursus is necessary here concerning a challenge which Fox has raised. The first was to question whether the commentaries were really commentaries in the traditional sense of the genre. Noting the similarity of homiletic and polemical style between Philoxenos' commentaries and his other extant works, Fox concluded that the use of Arab in the colophon of BL Add. 17126 "cannot in this context mean an exegetical work in any narrow sense.... We conclude that **CANAN** in this context is a homiletical exposition of a Biblical verse...into which are introduced the author's theological presuppositions" Fox, Matthew-Luke Commentary, 205. De Halleux responded strongly to Fox's objection that these works should be classified as homiletical, by pointing out how the structure of the Commentary on the Prologue of John negated such a claim "...sans aucune division en « chapitres », les cent nonante-neuf feuillets de l'Add. 14,534 feraient assurément une interminable et bien indigeste harangue !" de Halleux, "Philoxène: Deux éditions récentes," 31. Nevertheless, de Halleux did agree that the term **ADA** should not be understood in the same way as a modern exegetical commentary, looking to describe the ouevre this way: "Commentaire au sens impropre, si l'on veut, mais incarnant de toute façon une entreprise expressément vouée à l'explication de passages évangéliques controversés. Commentaire à la manière de Philoxène, certes, c'est-à-dire plus riche de digressions théologiques que d'exégèse strictement dite, mais néanmoins une œuvre dont le caractère homilétique est exclu...." de Halleux, "Philoxène: Deux éditions récentes," 30. For our purposes, two observations can clarify this debate. First, Fox seems to want to hold the genre of Biblical commentary to a very fixed and modern definition which is inappropriate to the historical context. This may be due to the fact that Fox largely ignores the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentaries in this period. Secondly, as will be demonstrated below, Philoxenos is interested in appropriating the authority associated with commentary literature (ADLA) while at the same time explicitly repudiating the speculative exegetical approach of Theodore. Accordingly, it is quite natural for Philoxenos to style his works as commentaries even if in content they differ from the norm for the genre.

<sup>185</sup> As Theresia Hainthaler notes, "Zweifellos ist Theodor von Mopsuestia der Hauptvertreter der antiochenischen Exegese und für die Ostsyrische Kirche der 'Interpret' schlechthin." Theresia Hainthaler, "Die 'antiochenische Schule' und theologische Schulen im Bereich des antiochenischen Patriarchats," in *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche: Die Kirchen von Jerusalem und Antiochien nach 451 bis 600*, eds. Alois Grillmeier and

Of Theodore's works, it was his commentaries that found widespread influence in Syria and Mesopotamia. His Biblical commentaries were alternately praised and banned at the School of the Persians, and may have been the textbooks from which Philoxenos learned exegesis as a young man. More important than the actual commentaries of Theodore, however, was the way in which his reputation as an exegete had taken on mythic authority, especially in the Church of the East. 187

The respect which Theodore enjoyed among some Syriac speaking Christians is perhaps best grasped from its inverted reflection in the efforts of Philoxenos and other miaphysite authors to discredit him. For example, in his *Letter to Abu Ya'fur* (which dates to the same period as his commentaries), Philoxenos advanced a history of Theodore which both maligned his character and portrayed him as an active co-conspirator with Nestorius. <sup>188</sup> Similarly the slightly later heresiology of Simeon of Beth Arsham presented Theodore as a

Theresia Hainthaler, Jesus der Christus 2/3 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 237. For Theodore's legacy as a commentator see Becker, School of Nisibis, 113-125. The eagerly anticipated dissertation on Theodore by Daniel Schwartz has influenced my interpretation of Theodore on this point as well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Becker, *School of Nisibis*, 113-125; Hainthaler, "Die "antiochenische Schule"," 250-252; de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 25-27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> As Becker notes about the sixth century, "A process of mythologizing key Greek patristic thinkers can be seen in the sources, a mythologizing that should be read critically. Thus we should remain aware of how the figure of Theodore (and of other fathers) also had a symbolic value that transcended the actual content of his writings" Becker, *School of Nisibis*, 116.

<sup>188</sup> Briefly, Theodore and Nestorius are presented as cousins descended from a pagan Persian who fled to the Roman Empire to escape punishment for striking a pregnant woman and causing an abortion! Of particular note here is the fact that this section, which Harb and others have titled "Origine de Nestorius" is, in actuality, concerned just as much if not more with Theodore. Indeed, Philoxenos' strategy in the letter is to erase any distinction theologically or morally between the two dyophysites. See Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Lettre au Abū Ya'fūr*, 191-200.

key link in handing down heretical teaching from Caiaphas and Simon Magus to later Nestorians.<sup>189</sup>

The revolt against Theodore's symbolic authority was perhaps most visible in Philoxenos' maneuvering to have him posthumously condemned by Flavian, Patriarch of Antioch. Philoxenos was the mastermind behind this 14 year campaign (498-512) to use the condemnation of Theodore as wedge to force Flavian from office. In this light, Philoxenos' Biblical commentaries should be seen as yet another strategy to undermine the authority of Theodore, "the father and cause of error and laxity." Well aware of the influence of Theodore, the Anxan, Philoxenos decided to fight fire with fire by writing his own Biblical commentaries (Anxan) founded upon a new translation of the Syriac New Testament.

In addition to the personal and social contexts for Philoxenos' commentaries, we may add a moral dimension. Philoxenos blamed the "books of Theodore the heretic" for what he considered to be the theological and moral decline of the church in Mesopotamia. In an undated work titled *Seven Chapters* found in BL Add. 14604, Philoxenos wrote:

<sup>189 .</sup>حسك، همتوهم محمدتهم، محمدتهم، ما محمدتهم، محمدتهم، محمدتهم، محمدتهم، محمدتهم، محمدته، عبيرة العام العا

<sup>190</sup> de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> See the strategy discussed in chapter one and laid out by Philoxenos in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Palestine*, 36-37.

<sup>192 :</sup> אם באלא שלאם איבה מהס Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 136. See also Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 21, 52.

It is right that the books of the heretics, those of Diodore and Theodore and Theodoret, should be anathematized.... [It is right] that the impious canons should be anathematized which were promulgated by Acacius and Barsauma and the rest of the bishops of the country of the Persians, who are against the true faith of the fathers and for the books of Theodore the Heretic and against virginity, holiness, abstinence, and asceticism.<sup>193</sup>

Although the *Seven Chapters* probably postdate Philoxenos' commentaries, we have already seen that these moral concerns about Theodore's method can also be found in the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*: "He [Theodore] become the father and cause of error and laxity, and along with the word about the faith, he changed and corrupted also the strength of the commandments." With the phrase "the commandments", Philoxenos had in mind the Synod which the Church of the East held in 486 under Catholicos Acacius. In its first two canons, it had condemned miaphysite Christology and condemned wandering monks, whom it charged with spreading the miaphysite heresy. Its third and final canon had

ירני בלם במישטא ....רלי ימדלאה שמימדלאה שמימדלאה שמימדלאה שמימדלאה במימדלאה במימדלא

 <sup>195</sup> See the discussion in Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 381), 135 n.
 19. A general introduction is in Samuel H. Moffett, A History of Christianity in Asia: Beginnings to 1500, 3 vols. ([San Francisco]: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 197-199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Synod of 486 (Church of the East), published as Synode de Mar Acacius, in Synodicon orientale, ou recueil de synodes nestoriens, ed. and trans. Jean Baptiste Chabot (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 55.

scandalized Philoxenos with its loosening of the ascetic regulations concerning episcopal marriage.<sup>197</sup>

As we shall see below, for Philoxenos, rightly interpreting scripture was closely tied to keeping scripture's commandments. Playing fast and loose with the text of scripture would lead to similar behavior in other domains of clerical and ascetic life. The canons of Acacius were all that Philoxenos needed to confirm the risk of moral decline inherent in the commentaries of Theodore.

#### ANTI-COMMENTARIES

Besides the collapse of ascetic discipline, Philoxenos saw another spiritual threat in Theodore's approach to scripture. With its emphasis upon rational explanation, Philoxenos considered the Antiochene approach to scripture to be fundamentally lacking in reverence for the mysteries of the faith. In his comments on the *Peshitta* translation Philoxenos not only criticized the deformations of the Biblical text, but also was wary of human opinion being introduced into the text. He complained of the *Peshitta* translators: "Thus it can everywhere be recognized that they have not translated (anxa) the words of the Apostle, but introduced their own opinion into their translations (anxa):"198

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Synod of 486, 56-59.

This same charge of substituting heretical opinion in place of the revered Biblical text also applied to Theodorean commentators. In fact, it becomes difficult at times to tell in Philoxenos' polemics which he has in mind, since the Syriac term are enjoys a wide semantic range from "translate" to "comment." Accordingly, it was not a stretch for Philoxenos to extend his critique of the translators to Theodore and his students. Their fault was to have gone beyond what was written in Scripture to explain the mystery of Christ's incarnation. The result of such speculation was "sending forth blasphemy against him (Christ), under the pretext of commentary (range)." 200

Philoxenos' primary objection was that Theodorean inquiries into and speculation upon the Biblical text were an affront to the miracle of the incarnation. In the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, he explained:

It is not permitted to ask how it was that He was when He had not yet become, nor how he became although he was not changed. For the act of inhomination is a wonder and it is not the custom of a wonder to be inquired after or commented upon (apart from nature, or every wonder is either above nature, or not in nature, or apart from nature, or contrary to nature. And because it is thus, it is not permitted to ask about it, nor to judge it, nor to seek it out.<sup>201</sup>

באם. (Halis Saxonum: Niemeyer, 1928), s.v. באם. (Carolo Brockelmann, *Lexicon syriacum*, 2d ed. (Halis Saxonum: Niemeyer, 1928), s.v.

<sup>200 ...</sup> באם בסאה כפּים באם באם באם באם באם Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 19.

Later in the same work, he went on to explain how following such forbidden paths of inquiry led Theodore and Diodore into error after their controversies with the Arians:

For the heresiarchs of Nestorius, I mean Diodore and Theodore, were accustomed to argue powerfully against the Arians over the words put in the prologue of the book of John. And it was from these words that they grew tired of showing that the Son is coessential with the Father and that he is not like one of the creatures.... And even though the fathers of this heresy [Diodore and Theodore] knew how...to fight against the Arians (who, with evil intent, had understood and commented about those things written concerning the essence of the Word)—I do not know how, but as far as the things which they [Diodore and Theodore] should have believed with us, their knowledge perished and instead they employed the same art of inquiry as their opponents [the Arians] and were foolishly caught by the things which they had wisely refuted in the other heretics.... And this happened to them only because they had changed the sense and meaning of the words [of scripture].... For commentary (<a href="#capa">Capa</a>) on those things which must be received by faith is found to be blasphemy and not doctrine, an error and not that knowledge which is suitable to truth. <a href="#capa">202</a>

In this light, Philoxenos' objections to Theodorean commentary on the incarnation were more than a matter of disagreement over competing interpretations. Philoxenos repudiated the endeavor of commentary on the incarnation altogether.

A cursory lexical examination of his commentaries confirms the point. The verb and its derivatives almost always have a negative connotation in Philoxenos' usage—with the exception of references to Philoxenos' own translation and commentary projects.

This usage is ironic, given Philoxenos' appropriation of the term for his own work! This seems, however, to be precisely the rhetorical point Philoxenos wanted to make. To coin a phrase, Philoxenos' "commentaries" on the gospels perhaps should be seen as "anti-commentaries." His rejection of commentary was put forward in stark terms in the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, where Philxenos repudiated the worldly methods of Theodore and his followers:

Worldly knowledge is usually found through readings, and words, and vocabulary (which are newly taught), and through disputation and proof which is gathered from every thing. But that knowledge which is above such knowledge is divine and of the Spirit. And it is not formed out of research, nor discussion, nor probing, nor by controversy; those things which are at motion in every one who inquires after words and nouns!"<sup>203</sup>

While such language is a bit surprising in a work claiming to be a commentary (and given the fact that Philoxenos was responsible for the introduction of new Christological vocabulary into Syriac!), it makes sense in light of the multiple polemical contexts which spurred on Philoxenos' commentary work.

On a personal level, Philoxenos hoped to avoid the errors which sloppy translation had caused. Within the ecclesiastical society of Syria and Mesopotamia, he hoped to depose Theodore from his position of authority as the authorized "Commentator" of the church. And on a spiritual plane, Philoxenos hoped to stem the tide of heresy by cutting off its source: inappropriate inquiry and commentary concerning the ineffable mysteries of the

divine. In each of Philoxenos' various concerns, we may also see the influence of the Evagrian system of divine knowledge. Indeed, in place of Theodorean scriptural interpretation (<a href="#">CDECAS</a>), Philoxenos' commentaries presented an alternative miaphysite hermeneutic on the Evagrian model.

## "Thus It Is Necessary for One to Read in the Scripture for a Short Time": Toward a Miaphysite Hermeneutic

Philoxenos' opposition to what he saw as heretical forms of inquiry and commentary led him to advocate a clear method for scripture reading in his commentaries. Ironically, it was a method which in many ways was the product of his Antiochene training at the School of the Persians in Edessa, where Philoxenos read both Theodore and Evagrius Ponticus. Similar to Antiochene exegesis, Philoxenos advocated a strict literal reading. With regard to matters of the incarnation, he allowed no wavering from what he considered to be the immediate reading of the text:

...the expressions which are said about the faith [in scripture] do not allow commentary (<a>commentary</a>. Thus, 'God sent his Son and he became of a woman'—as it is written, so it is to be believed and it does not admit another meaning. 'The Word became flesh and came to dwell in us'—its commentary (<a>commentary</a> (<a>commentary</a> (<a>commentary</a>) is its reading and faith accepts the same.

Watt, "Philoxenus and Evagrius' *Centuries*," 75. On the fusion of Antiochene and Alexandrian forms of exegesis in Philoxenos see the insightful comments in Edip [H. E. Mor Polycarpus] Aydin, "The Christological Thought of Philoxenos of Mabbug in Reaction to the Council of Chalcedon" (Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Heythrop College, University of London, 1995), 14.

For Philoxenos, this type of reading was necessary if the text were to directly transmit the mystery of the incarnation to the faithful. The transmission of the mystery was built upon a threefold framework developed from Evagrian catagories. The first step was rejection of human knowledge. The second step was to approach the text with faith, simplicity and the fear of God. The third and final step was the direct experience of the Divine through the wonder of the incarnation in the scriptures. As a path to the divine, scripture incorporated its hearers into the divine *oikonomia* and became a means of divine knowledge. It was this revelatory process which Philoxenos championed against the scriptural reading practices of his dyophysite opponents.

### "SILENT AS THE CLAY IS WITH THE POTTER": REJECTION OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

We have already caught a glimpse of the first step in Philoxenos' rejection of Theodorean commentary above. In general, Philoxenos rejected, as a form of vainglory, the efforts of human knowledge to understand scripture. <sup>206</sup> Vain erudition reflected the wrong attitude toward God, the scriptures, and the incarnation:

Because of those things which the heretics now ask—how does God exist; or in what way did He beget a son; or how the Word, His son, become flesh; or how, in the beginning, He made the creatures from nothing....—because of these things and the like, the word of God was clearly set down by Paul and Isaiah, that all men are obliged to become as the clay is to the potter.... For concerning such things which one may inquire about God, or about His providence or His judgments, or about those other things which come about in the *oikonomia* which is in the flesh, these things are indeed mysteries which are very subtle and hidden and no knowledge

<sup>206 .</sup> איז אביא איז איז מישט איז איז פרישוא אויא פרישוא איז פריש איז Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 168.

about them has been placed in us by the creator. Thus it is right that we should be silent as the clay is with the potter. <sup>207</sup>

Besides failing to show the right reverence toward God, such inquiries based on human modes of knowing failed to take into account that the subject of their inquiries fell outside the domain of human knowledge.

Philoxenos continued the metaphor of the potter this way:

...the knowledge which is in us about God is there naturally. And that which comes from above that knowledge is found to be supernatural. And every thought which comes, either concerning God, or concerning His creatures, or concerning His providence is supernatural, surpassing, and foreign to that knowledge which is placed in us. And he who seeks to inquire into these things is rightly compared to clay and dust by the Apostle. <sup>208</sup>

In short, inquiry would not lead to the understanding of God or scripture. As Evagrius had taught, spiritual knowledge was not had through human means.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, Gnostikos (Guillaumont edition), 92.

### FAITH, SIMPLICITY, AND THE FEAR OF GOD

The path to spiritual knowledge lay not in commentary but through faith. Philoxenos saw faith as the primary approach to scripture. Indeed, faith was a prerequisite to the right interpretation of scripture:

It is seen then in every place that the heretics suppose that the "becoming (flesh)" of the Word must be explained ( as "assuming (a body)." But this is the meaning only of their own supposition and it is not the true meaning of the phrase (in question). And it is not permissible to think that because the phrase cannot be explained ( ( ) its force is weakened. Rather its greatness is clearly revealed through the fact that the phrase was not sufficient to reveal its own explanation ( ). For it is known to every Christian that for the sake of the words (and deeds which are like them) faith was placed in us by the Lord that in the manner of faith we might hold and guard such things. This the apostles also understood, that every phrase or deed of Christ requires faith. Thus they asked him, entreating, that he might add to their faith. 210

Faith (and not explanation) was the key to approaching scripture. The interpreter was not allowed to pick and choose what to believe: "For it is not fitting for the one who calls himself a disciple of the scriptures to receive some of the words which are set in them and to

ביני באבילו הלו האפיל בלוסה בילי המביני המבליה הלוסה הכללה הלוסה הלוסה ביני האפיל הלוסה הלוסה הלוסה המבליה ולוסה המפול הלוסה המלחה הלוסה המלחה מלוסה הלוסה הלוסה המלחה מלוסה הלוסה ביני האוסה הלוסה ביני האוסה הלוסה ביני האוסה הלוסה ביני האוסה הלוסה הלוסה הלוסה ביני האוסה הלוסה ביני האוסה הלוסה ביני היני היני הלוסה המנוני המוסח הלוסה הלוסה ביני הלוסה בי

reject others, to believe some and to doubt the rest."<sup>211</sup> For Philoxenos, entire text had to be believed; it was true because it was written in the holy scriptures.

While Philoxenos refused to explain the mysteries of scripture—simply appealing to faith as an alternative—he was, however, willing to explain further the workings of faith. In fact, Philoxenos identified two spiritual qualities which were closely tied to the approach of faith to scripture. These qualities were simplicity (<a href="https://docume.com/hexa">https://docume.com/hexa</a>) and the fear of God ( https://docume. Just as the inquiring approach of Theodorean commentary was to be condemned due to its wicked blasphemy, so the Philoxenian approach carried with it corresponding virtues.

These virtues were not new; Philoxenos' promotion of simplicity ( halias) and fear of God ( halias) was an echo of the Evagrian system. By the time of writing his Biblical commentaries, Philoxenos had already adapted the Evagrian categories of faith, simplicity, and the fear of God, and assigned them key roles in the ascetic system which he

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> For example, John Eudes Bamberger noted: "Another important feature of Evagrian doctrine on prayer is the stress that he places on its purity. By this purity he means it is beyond all limiting concepts, beyond any idea, however noble or lofty or elevated, that stands between the soul and the Trinity, who is not only beyond all forms but is beyond multiplicity. The Trinity is Simplicity, and thus can be approached only in the greatest simplicity of spirit. In this theology, all clear distinct ideas are a form of ignorance; true knowledge is an infinite ignorance." Evagrius Ponticus, On Prayer, in The Praktikos [and] Chapters on Prayer, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, Cistercian Studies 4 (Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 48.

laid out in the *Discourses*.<sup>213</sup> Philoxenos incorporated this same system into his method of reading scripture.

In this regard, Philoxenos' doctrine of simplicity is the place to begin because his aim was to demonstrate that simplicity was the beginning not only of all faith but also of all knowledge. In his system, faith and simplicity worked together. Simplicity was a pathway to the assumption of faith. The simple one did not challenge or inquire, but was open to be taught. From this attitude of simplicity with its implicit faith, the believer could then move on to an explicit faith:

For not only does the faith which is put in natural simplicity appear before faith in Christ, but also in all human doctrine. And everyone who learns is still a child and simple with respect to that which is handed on to him. And when each one of the students has grown...they become also seers of the hidden wisdom in both doctrines, divine and human.<sup>214</sup>

Seen in this light, simplicity was a mechanism for establishing faith in the mysteries of the incarnation.

Such faith was a matter of simplicity like the faith of a child and not a matter of inquiries or questions. To this end, Philoxenos frequently cited the example of the Biblical patriarch Abraham:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> See chapter five. Faith is the topic of the first four discourses. Simplicity shares the focus of the fourth and is treated in the fifth discourse. Fear of God is the theme of discourses six and seven. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:3, 26, 52, 74, 120, 159, 191. See also the discussion in Eugène Lemoine, "La Spiritualité de Philoxène de Mabboug," *L'Orient Syrien* 2, 1 (1957): 352-55; Irénée Hausherr, "Spiritualité syrienne: Philoxène de Mabboug en version française," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 23, 1-2 (1957): 171-85.

<sup>214</sup> حسبت تمسح به بالمان ما به بالمان ما به بالمان به بالمان به بالمان به بالمان بالما

And it is known that in every place Faith corresponds to simplicity.... For thus Abraham also took simplicity upon himself when he believed in God and it was not by the craftiness of his thoughts that he heard Him.... But the simplicity of Abraham was natural, that of a baby toward its mother or wet-nurse.... Therefore, if we also listen in simplicity to the things which God has said to us through the scriptures, and especially those which are words about the mysteries, our faith will be like that of Abraham. <sup>215</sup>

On a pragmatic level then, the hermeneutic of simplicity served as an alternative to the speculative inquiries which had fueled the Christological controversies. Rather than ask questions, the believer was to "merely believe that He exists. And no one should strive to inquire about something superfluous, but instead approach Him with service and worship and make perfect his entire will through keeping His commandments." <sup>216</sup> In short, scripture did not exist to completely reveal the divine mysteries. In the first instance, its focus was on practice, that is leading humans to perfection and obedience.

Philoxenos' appeal to simplicity should not, however, be seen as solely pragmatic. As noted above, simplicity was a spiritually charged category. In asceticism, the term ἀπλότης had a distinguished pedigree as a description of the ideal innocent state of the monastic

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mind.<sup>217</sup> Philoxenos had explained in his *Discourses* how this state of mind was essential to the ascetic life:

Our Lord has given us in His Gospel an easy and ready beginning—a right and true faith which is moved naturally in simple thought, so that by this faith we may be obedient to Him, and keep His commandments, just as also all the righteous ones of old of early times who were called by God heard His word with simplicity, and by faith they affirmed His promises.... only by faith and simplicity can a man hear and receive, just as Abraham, who was called, went forth after God... <sup>218</sup>

Simplicity led the believer to action, to obey the commandments of scripture.<sup>219</sup> Obeying the commandments was the next step after faith and simplicity in the spiritual progression. In his *Discourses*, Philoxenos described this phase as "the fear of God":

the true fear of God is from true faith, and whoever truly believes will himself also truly fear Him in whom he believes. And just as his faith does not stand by means of trickery, so also his fear does not come from craftiness; for as soon as a man believes in God (that He exists), he begins to receive the doctrine of His commandments. For faith is born of the simplicity of nature, and it is established and kept by simplicity in the same way. Now those commandments which faith hears and receives, fear of God keeps them; for in the way in which simplicity keeps faith, so also the fear of God keeps God's commandments.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. ἀπλότης.

 $<sup>^{218}</sup>$  אה אוניבים אלעבים אלעבים האוניבים בשבילא. הבה בא איניבא אלעבים איניבא איניבא

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Simplicity was more than a hermeneutic; it was part of an active rejection of evil, in this case the craftiness and inquisitiveness behind the Christological controversies. We shall return to this vice, which Philoxenos attributed to his opponents, in chapter one.

As with simplicity, Philoxenos saw the fear of God as part of a direct hermeneutic without any room for equivocation. The scriptures are to be believed in simplicity and then obeyed.

#### THE INCARNATION AND SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

Ultimately, the aim of such simple obedience was to lead the believer into to spiritual knowledge. Following Evagrius, Philoxenos also explained in his *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*:

It is necessary therefore for those who desire that they might become receivers of the knowledge about these mysteries that instead of study in words (and especially of those words which engender controversy), they should persevere in the toils of life and keep the commandments which were entrusted (to us) by our Savior, from which they are able to gain wholeness of soul and a pure mind and to come into impassibility, which is the demonstration of the life of the new man.<sup>221</sup>

It is here that we begin to fully grasp how scripture functioned as a source of divine knowledge in the third and culminating step of Philoxenos' method for reading scripture.

Following Evagrius, Philoxenos presented divine vision as the summit of progress in asceticism and contemplation. In his *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, he laid out the steps by which faith, simplicity, and keeping the commandments (fear of God) led to spiritual knowledge and vision:

בה, בה גשלא המשהמם אחל בא בילו האמשה האמשה האמליא בילוא האמשה האמליא בילוא האמידים בילוא בילוא האמידים בילוא בילוא האמידים בילוא בילוא

Because those who are about to learn this [the mystery of the incarnation] are for the most part adults, it is necessary that they are born again and become children. And in this order they should come to receive the doctrine concerning it. And they should grow in it by milk through faith until they become adults.... For it was said by fathers and doctors of old [eg. Evagrius] to one of those who rightly desired to know how to understand the meanings of the words of the holy scriptures: Whoever desired to become an adult in Christ and one who sees the knowledge of the mysteries, that he must be born again from water and the spirit as our Lord said. And in the place of milk (which is given to the natural infant in drops), he must be suckled and strengthened through faith in order to learn to fear God and to keep the commandments.<sup>222</sup>

So a childlike faith and an unquestioning keeping of the commandments were part of Philoxenos' path to spiritual maturation. This process would lead to understanding of the words of scripture and eventually to a divine knowledge of the mystery of the incarnation.

The aim of Philoxenos' method of spiritual progress is clear. But one aspect of this system is elusive in Philoxenos' commentaries. In spite of a lengthy presentation of the process, Philoxenos was circumspect about the specific role of scripture. There are at least three reasons for this. The first is that the role of scripture was perhaps so obvious that it ended up being assumed. For example, in this passage one catches a veiled glimpse of it:

And to say it briefly, this spiritual wisdom, which is only taken from the *oikonomia* which is in the flesh, is entirely interior to the [bodily] senses. And only by spiritual perception or spiritual vision—beyond any composite words—is the mind able to

perceive it, and that only if it is pure of evil passions and rightly holding the word concerning God and if it has the assistance of the Spirit. <sup>223</sup>

 $<sup>^{223}</sup>$  אלאסיביי באראה השלאסיבי הארשבי הא

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>224</sup> The mystery of the incarnation and humankind's salvation is subsumed in Philoxenos' writing under the expression "economy (حمدناهم) in the flesh." It is this "ineffable mystery" which is made known to the faithful by scripture, to be taken up in faith without subjection to commentary or inquiry. And around the core of this mystery is a Biblical passage, John 1:14. Philoxenos explains the importance of this passage in these terms: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt in us.' We have been commanded to only believe in this and not to discuss it or to inquire. And if the Lord did not know that it would be applied to him.... He would not have allowed the evangelist to put it in the scripture and to fix it as the foundation of the whole edifice of the economy in the flesh," Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 393), 55. Included in this "economy in the flesh" was not only Christ's incarnation, indicated by the first half of the verse, but also the symmetrical relationship in which the faithful become children of God through baptism and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as indicated by "dwelt in us." Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 393), 52; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 39. Philoxenos followed traditional theology of divinization, noting that in both cases there is an act of "becoming" ( concept which is at the center of the economy in the flesh in Philoxenos. To underscore how central these two concepts, economy and becoming, are to the work, note that according to de Halleux's index, citations of John 1:14 or discussions of "becoming" occur over 175 times in the Commentary on the Prologue of John. Likewise there are over 40 discussions of "economy." Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 266-68. Similar patterns hold, although lesser in number, for the Commentary on Matthew and Luke as well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 50, §22.

This leads us to the second reason for Philoxenos' reluctance to explain exactly how scripture passages about the incarnation function to reveal the divine mystery. He viewed words as incapable of expressing the process:

And we ought to understand that the words which are written about the *oikonomia* which is in the flesh are mysteries and a demonstration of something which is hidden. And there is no way that either a mystery or types of hidden things can reveal the hidden wisdom through words, nor can words reveal the *kenosis*, the becoming, the conception, the nativity, the needs and the passions, or the act of his death.<sup>226</sup>

Not only was Philoxenos wary of falling into the temptation of inapproptriate commentary that afflicted his opponents, but also on a certain level, he contended that words could not explain the mysteries transmitted by scripture. <sup>227</sup> How can one explain the ineffable? Ultimately Philoxenos concluded that it is enough to state that such a transmission happens: "The scriptures were not given to teach these things [about the incarnation], rather they were given so that we might take faith in the mysteries from them." Just as faith and the incarnation were mysteries, so too the exchange between the two was beyond comprehension.

Beyond these two rhetorical explanations, there is a third reason why the role of scripture was understated in Philoxenos' path to spiritual knowledge. This reason was not

 $<sup>^{226}</sup>$  . معمم  $^{226}$  . Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 186.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Philoxenos compared this transmission to that of Paul's preaching which is able to draw its hearers to faith without words of human wisdom. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380)*, 188.

explicit in his commentaries. Instead we must return to the *Letter to Patricius of Edessa* which Philoxenos wrote in perhaps the same period as his commentaries.<sup>229</sup> This letter further explained the Evagrian system of spiritual knowledge which undergirded Philoxenos' Biblical commentaries.

At the core of Philoxenos' letter is the question of contemplation (θεωρία/κό) and divine knowledge. He wrote in response to a monk who sought advice on contemplation, asking if it was really necessary to obey the commandments of scripture. Philoxenos responded with instructions on the proper reading of scripture and a reminder of his reasons for rejecting dyophysite speculation and methods of commentary:

Thus far, this admonition is what we would expect given the warnings against speculation and inquiry we have seen above. What is different here is that Philoxenos goes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> On the date, de Halleux estimates that it was durinig his episcopate but before 505. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 259.

further to reveal the monastic context for his polemic. The multiplicity of words and arguments destroy the simplicity and focus of the monk's contemplation. Philoxenos continued his advice to Patricius by warning him not to read the Bible too much! "For this reason, I think, it is not necessary that the solitary continue in many readings. For stillness is not made in the readings, but trouble. And they do not collect the mind, but distract it."

Of course Philoxenos was quick to explain that it was good to read the Bible in small amounts and in the right way. He explained further what function scripture served:

And if you say to me that it is written by one of the blessed ones [Evagrius], that readings of the scriptures collect the thoughts, I say that also this is true. It does collect the thoughts of he who answers the world or he who turns toward the world and of he whose whole self is apart from himself. Thus it is necessary for one to read in the scripture for a short time until one becomes conscious that one's thought has been collected and then one should turn from reading to purity of prayer lest in reading one seek the knowledge and explanation (purity of the words and fall again into the same state of distraction. Instead, one should seek the spiritual contemplation of the words, for in that alone does the heart take delight.<sup>232</sup>

Here the role of scripture in directing contemplation was stressed, but even in this case,

Philoxenos was much more concerned with steering Patricius away from the real dangers of
scripture reading to monastic life.

Philoxenos elaborated these dangers in a passage which must reflect overtones of the monastic world Philoxenos knew. This was an asceticism overly troubled by theological controversy and by too many theologians and commentators (including Philoxenos himself?):

For not everyone reads the scriptures well or with knowledge, so there is one who reads the scriptures in order to recite it, and another to memorize it, and another desires to learn commentary (Koras), and another to learn exercises of the knowledge of the soul, and another disputation with heretics, and another is moved by passion for learning—though to tell the truth it is vainglory. And in any one of these goals or in all of them, the mind reads until it is looking outside [itself]. For what need does a solitary have for what the explanation (Koras) of a certain word is or for what the meaning of such-and-such phrase is? Walk the path before you and stand in the place of [spiritual] knowledge and you will have no need for questions about it [spiritual knowledge]. If then you do ask concerning it, it will be known that you stand outside of the place of knowledge. For the eye of the body does not ask but it sees the sun [directly], and the mind's eye does not investigate and then see spiritual knowledge, rather it [works] just the same as when the eye in the sun comes upon its sight and is illuminated by it.... For it is sufficient for the solitary that he should only wonder at the expression of scripture. And if it is a commandment, he should keep it. And if it is a story, he should know who told it and for what reason. And if it is a parable, he should not allow himself the liberty to explain it ( Lexaux). And if it is a mystery, it suffices for him to know it and not to reveal it.... For we can take only a word on these things from the scriptures and not the knowledge about them; for all the words of the scriptures are given to the hearing of faith.<sup>233</sup>

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This was much as Philoxenos was willing say about how scripture should be used. For the Philoxenian monk, arriving at divine knowledge through scripture was both profoundly limited and open to infinite ineffable possibilities. As Philoxenos explained in the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*:

The nature of God is not enclosed in [earthly] natures, as if one might seek and find Him in them or [even] in the Holy Scriptures. [Human] knowledge about Him is put into the [earthly] natures and faith in Him is put into the scriptures. Thus he is known by natures and believed through scripture. And we have only [human] knowledge about him and faith. But He, Himself, we leave to rest with his essence, above all silence.<sup>234</sup>

For Philoxenos, the vision of God was approachable in stillness, but not through human understanding of scripture. Instead scripture, when read properly, delivered a supernatural and direct revelation of God. Moreover, Philoxenos warned that trying to approach the divine through the misuse of scripture would destroy the stillness requisite for that divine vision.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In his *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*, Philoxenos referred to the evangelist as "the messenger of the mysteries." For Philoxenos, the greatest mystery of the Gospels (and

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<sup>235</sup> אוזא המסבונה Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 392), 64.

indeed of the Christian faith) was the incarnation. In his view, the scriptures performed an essential task in transmitting the mystery of the incarnation to the faithful. For this mystagogical function to succeed, scripture had to be believed in simplicity of faith. Such faith allowed one to perceive (although not understand) the *oikonomia* in the flesh and its transformation of humankind into children of God. Following Evagrius, Philoxenos understood this transformation in terms of ascetic maturity and the acquisition of knowledge of the divine.

The contemplative life that such a process of spiritual maturation required was incompatible with the heated Christological controversies of the late fifth century. The commentaries of Theodore and the Christological inquiries of the Antiochene school sought knowledge of God through searching the scriptures and the application of rational categories. Philoxenos saw this approach to divine knowledge as a road to heresy and a threat to his vision of true scripture reading and contemplation. It was in response to this threat that his Biblical commentaries were written and his New Testament translation project undertaken.

These projects of the Mabbug scriptorium pitted the Philoxenian (and Evagrian) approach to scripture against of the mythic authority of Theodore and the Antiochene commentary tradition. Against this construction of Theodore, Philoxenos argued that the real purpose of scripture was not to provide the sort of human knowledge which Theodore and his students sought to extract via commentary. In the end, scripture did teach about the incarnation, but by direct revelation to the one who contemplated it in faith. Scripture was

needed at the beginning to teach obedience to the commandments and to begin contemplation of the divine vision.

In short, while Philoxenos' disagreements with the dyophysite commentators focused on interpreting Christological passages, that was only one point of conflict. At its core, the disagreement was a deeper one about the correct way to gain knowledge of God from scripture. By examining Christological differences as competing approaches to reading scripture we gain fresh insight into the nature of the theological conflict; it was a disagreement, at least in part, over spiritual practice. When proof texts collided with contemplation of the ineffable, the single-mindedness of the ascetic was sure to be disturbed.

# CHAPTER FOUR WHOM TO WORSHIP? LITURGICAL PRACTICE AND CHRISTOLOGICAL POLEMIC

"Though He cannot be eaten, we consume Him..."236

- Letter to the Monks on Faith

#### INTRODUCTION

We have seen how Philoxenos rallied support for the miaphysite Christology by tying it to an Evagrian epistemology and hermeneutic of contemplation. In doing so, Philoxenos drew on the Apostle Paul's dictum, "Faith is from hearing and hearing is from the word of God." In this chapter we turn to examine the primary occasion for hearing the scriptures in late antique Christianity— the liturgy. Like scripture and contemplation, Philoxenos viewed the liturgy as a point of contact with the divine. Accordingly, the common experiences of liturgical practice and the complex social and spiritual system they constructed served as a bedrock for Philoxenos' polemics. His criticisms of the Chalcedonian creed drew upon what he took to be universal interpretations of key liturgical practices such as the Eucharist, baptism, and the presence of the Holy Spirit through the rite. Through an investigation of Philoxenos' appeal to the liturgy, this chapter will shed light on

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how he sought to rally support for miaphysites through appealing to issues of right worship, human access to God, and the spiritual struggle between the Holy Spirit and Satan.

This chapter analyzes Philoxenos' polemical appeal to the liturgy in terms of three related concerns about dyophysite Christology. The first apprehension was that dyophysite Christology, with its emphasis on theological precision and investigation, was incompatible with right worship. The second objection was that in demarcating an impenetrable boundary between God and humanity, the dyophysites ended up denying the central mysteries of the liturgy, cutting off human access to the divine. The final and most serious charge was that in rendering null the liturgical mysteries, dyophysite theology impeded the work of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, Philoxenos argued that dyophysite position was not merely a misguided intellectual pursuit, but a reflection of the absence of the Holy Spirit.

While Philoxenos made recourse to all three charges throughout his polemical career, there is a logical development which determines the order of their treatment here. At the most general level, Philoxenos attacked the critical theological approach of his opponents as being foreign to the worship experience of the church. Following the theology of Ephrem, he argued that the proper approach to Christ and to the incarnation was an attitude of awe, reverence and adoration. Biblical accounts of worship such as the story of the Nativity served as normative examples of this approach. Specifically, Philoxenos urged his readers to know Christ not as a philosophical matter, but directly in Christian worship. Just as the ancient worship practices in the Nativity narrative served to bring the faithful into knowledge of Christ, Philoxenos also assigned a similar role to the contemporary liturgical practices of the church. Drawing upon the *Trisagion* as well as the mysteries of the Eucharist

and baptism, Philoxenos argued that Christian worship practice, and not theological speculation, was the appropriate venue for understanding the incarnation.

Building on his general argument that dyophysite Christology was antithetical to right worship, Philoxenos sought to show how dyophysite inquiry into the incarnation would necessarily degenerate into confusion with detrimental implications for the liturgy—specifically with regard to the Eucharist and baptism. Philoxenos warned that dyophysite Christology with its emphasis on dividing Christ threatened the union of the faithful with God in the Eucharist. Similarly, due to its imperfect doctrine of incarnation, dyophysite theology rendered irrelevant the divinization available in baptism. In both cases, Philoxenos built his theological polemic upon a common sacramental and spiritual vision. The implications of dyophysite doctrine contravened the logic of the liturgy and the symmetry of the incarnation.

From this cutting of the liturgical link between God and man, Philoxenos drew his third and final cause for alarm—the dyophysite heresy impeded the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ's incarnation and the Holy Spirit's indwelling were related. Denial of the former prevented the occurrence of the latter through the Eucharist and baptism. Thus Philoxenos argued that erroneous teaching about Christ's incarnation interrupted the Spirit's role in the oikonomia of salvation.

This was Philoxenos' most powerful rhetorical strategy against Chalcedon. From the common liturgical experience of his audience, he was able to draw upon a common sacramental vision which he then portrayed as imperiled by the Christological heresies. It

was his hope that attachment of the faithful to the liturgy of the church could be transformed into an active opposition to Chalcedon.

#### "TO LEAD THE MIND TO WONDER": CHRISTOLOGY AND RIGHT WORSHIP

Appeals to the liturgy are common across all of Philoxenos' polemical writings, but can be especially found in the *The Phenqitho Against Habib* and *The Book of Sentences*. André de Halleux has dated these two works to the earlier part of Philoxenos' career. The *Phenqitho* can be securely dated to the period before Philoxenos' consecration, most likely during his exile from Antioch under the Patriarch Calendio in 482-484.<sup>238</sup> Its immediate *casus belli* was the *Trisagion* controversy.<sup>239</sup> *The Book of Sentences* is more difficult to date, but de Halleux is surely right to date it on stylistic grounds slightly later than the *Phenqitho* but before the consecration of Severus in 512.<sup>240</sup> In both cases, these works reflect a moment in the Christological controversies in which the liturgy served as a particular locus for the dispute.

Taken in its broadest sense, Philoxenos' main argument against the dyophysites was that they did not take the correct path to understanding the incarnation; their speculations did not come from the perspective of the worshiping church. In particular, Philoxenos objected to what he considered to be a lack of reverence on the part of the dyophysites.<sup>241</sup> In the previous chapter, we have had a foretaste of how Philoxenos presented reverence as an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 192, 237-38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> See the discussion of this below.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 245.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> As is true for most of Philoxenos' polemical positions, one can find that his opponents accused him of the same error. Cf. Habib, *Tractatus*, §11, 42, or 45 as examples.

antidote to Christological controversy. For example, in his commentary on Luke, Philoxenos rebuffed theological speculation in favor of wonder: "And it is not possible that wonders [from context—the incarnation] be explained [[action of And it is not possible that wonders of the marvel and to wonder at them..." In addition to Philoxenos' rejection of Christological explanation, this passage reveals the positive dimension which he assigned to the wonders of the incarnation. The miraculous nature of the incarnation was intended to have a specific effect on those who consider it—namely to lead them to worship.

This theology of wonder was not new to Philoxenos. He continued the approach to the incarnation advocated in Ephrem's *Hymns on Faith*. As Paul Russell and others have noted, Ephrem castigated the Arians for undertaking blasphemous inquiries when they should have been silent in wonder or speaking in praise.<sup>243</sup> Taking up this same theology of wonder in the *Book of Sentences*, Philoxenos advocated that the response of the Christian to God should be like that of Moses to the burning bush:

Do not come near; loose your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. Loose from yourself human thoughts, which like sandals

<sup>243</sup> Ephrem, Hymns on Faith, published as Ephraem the Syrian: 80 Hymns on Faith, trans. Paul Russell, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation 3 (Louvain: Peeters, forthcoming), x; Paul Russell, "Ephraem the Syrian on the Utility of Language and the Place of Silence," Journal of Early Christian Studies 8, 1 (2000): 21-37. I am grateful to Paul Russell for providing me with a draft version of his translation. For specific examples in Ephrem see Ephrem, Hymns on Faith, 23:15, 37:17, and 46:11 in Ephrem, Hymns on Faith, published as Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen De fide, ed. and trans. Edmund Beck, CSCO 73 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955). See also Edmund Beck, "Philoxenos und Ephräm," Oriens Christianus 46 (1962): 61-76; Edmund Beck, Ephräms des Syrers Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre, CSCO Subsidia 58 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1980); Sidney Griffith, Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997), 17 et passim; Charis Vandereyken-Vleugels, "Chasm, Bridge, and Response: Ephrem the Syrian's View on the Human Approach and Attitude Towards God as Seen in His Hymns on Faith" (Licentiaat Thesis, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, 2006).

tread the earth, and are polluted in mud and filth. Do not come in order to inquire (בניביא) but approach in order to wonder (זור (גוביא)). For the deed is a miracle, and the revelation is an ineffable wonder (ביי וואס).

Philoxenos' theology of wonder was a fusion of traditional Syriac approaches to the incarnation (from Ephrem's polmics against inquiry) with the Evagrian system of divine *gnosis* (the source of Philoxenos' analogy with Moses' sandals). In this light, we should not view Philoxenian wonder as a dumfounded stupor before the divine. Indeed it was just the opposite. As Robin Darling Young has noted, for Philoxenos "to wonder" (india) or

<sup>245</sup> Evagrius uses the same imagery of Moses before the burning bush in On Prayer 4. "If Moses, when he attempted to draw near the burning bush, was prohibited until he should remove the shoes from his feet, how should you not free yourself of every thought that is colored by passion seeing that you wish to see the One who is beyond every thought and perception?" Εί τἢ ἐπὶ γῆς βάτω φλεγομένη προσεγγίσαι πειράσας Μωϋσῆς κωλύεται ἄχρις οὖ λύσει τὸ ὑπόδημα τῶν ποδῶν, πῶς αὐτὸς τὸν ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἔννοιαν καὶ αἴσθησιν ἰδεῖν βουλόμενος, καὶ συνόμιλος αὐτῷ γενέσθαι, οὐ λύεις ἐκ σοῦ πὰν νόημα ἐμπαθές; English text from Evagrius Ponticus, On Prayer (Bamberger translation), 56. Greek text from Evagrius Ponticus, On Prayer (PG 79), 79:1168.

ראומביה of his incarnation.<sup>246</sup> Thus for Philoxenos, wonder served a function akin to Evagrian contemplation, it was a means of knowing the ineffable divine.<sup>247</sup>

With respect to the incarnation, Philoxenos further developed this tension between human inquiry (which arises from the desire for knowledge) and wonder (which in Philoxenos' system is prompted by faith's impulse to worship). Faith apprehended the incarnation "not through knowledge, but through wonder and amazement." Specifically, Philoxenos praised the example of the man blind from birth in John's gospel (John 9:38):

For the mystery of the incarnation is deep. And it cannot be fathomed by human knowledge...nor through faith. Because neither does faith have the strength that it could comprehend, for it only has the power to believe.... It is written that the Word who was visible in the flesh said to the blindman, "Do you believe in the son of God?" and he urged him to believe and not to understand (Local And for this reason, immediately—when Jesus had finished..., the blindman said, "I believe Lord," and he fell down to worship him. 249

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Darling Young discusses this concept only in passing as part of a larger examination of Philoxenos' doctrine of justification. Her entire comment is reproduced here: "If there is one word that dominates, and sets the tone for Philoxenos' thought about Christ and Christian *paideia/mimesis*, it is the trilateral Syriac root *dmar* and its various forms, including *tedmurtha* and the less frequently-used *dmor. Dmar* as a verb means "to wonder, to be amazed," and the substantives derived from it translate in the Peshitta the Greek words *paradoxa* (Lk 5:26), *thaumasia* (Mt 21:5) and *terata* (Mk 13:22). The attitude of wonder at the person of Christ is a necessary precondition for recognizing him and, it might also be added, for understanding the physical cosmos which was his work. But with regard to Christ himself, Philoxenos describes the incarnation as 'a miracle and nothing natural. Because of it we accept it by faith alone." Robin Darling Young, "Philoxenos of Mabbugh and the Syrian Patristic Understanding of Justification," *Communio* 27 (2000): 692-93.

<sup>247</sup> This observation does not absolve Lemoine's conflation of theoria (ܐܝܘܬ) and wonder (¬ܝܝܘܬ) in his translation of Philoxenos, but his mistake serves to further demonstrate how closely these two means of apprehending the divine were linked in Philoxenos thought. Cf. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Discourses, published as Homélies, trans. Eugène Lemoine, SC 44 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1956), 266 et passim; Hausherr, "Philoxène en version française," 183; Harb, "Philoxène à l'égard d'Évagre," 136.

<sup>248 .</sup> איס ביז איס ביז איס ביז איס ביז איס Philoxenos of Mabbug, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 83.

בכנם  $\mu$ י לאוא הכלכינענטלא. מהנל  $\mu$ י בנה בהלא אנצולא לא כבלא. מארץ בלא הלבי אלא בעם בה הלמשכן... הלא בע משכל ביה שבלא ביה שבלא בעל האפלא שהא הלהיע נשבל שלא. אלא בעם הלשטה הלשטר אנל לב כביש אנל בביש אללא הכלשיא שמא בשיא לא שמבא.

To his readers, Philoxenos presented this response as the normative pattern for communion with God. When considering the incarnate Christ, the appropriate response was to worship, not to ask questions. Indeed Philoxenos argued that intellectual understanding was inversely related to worship and wonder: "...the Creator is worshiped because he is not understood. And he fills those who seek him with wonder in as much as he is not comprehended by them." Accordingly, Philoxenos exhorted his hearers to follow the example of John in his gospel in keeping a certain silence about the incarnation:

Be persuaded then to preach with the Son of Thunder, John: "The Word became flesh." And keep silence with him concerning the division [of Christ], which would be a commentary on the act [of the incarnation]. And in fear and reverence, worship from afar the marvelous and divine mystery.<sup>251</sup>

The only human expression which Philoxenos permitted to break this reverent stillness was acclamation at the profundity of the mystery.<sup>252</sup> For example, Philoxenos himself often uttered such a doxological refrain in his Christological writings ("Oh act which is full of marvel, and mystery which is hidden and in effable that God has revealed to us!");<sup>253</sup>

רוא בה אכז. העשמבים מה אבר בה אבר הבל מה מה אבר בה אכז. העשמבים המלבם בה אכז. העשמבים המלבם בה בה בל השנה Philoxenos of Mabbug, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 45.

בבסגא גין לם מפנא. אלא מצאפע במי, גלא מאגיא. ממלא אמילא למינה גיבען למי. בבסגא גלא ממנא. אלא מאלים ממלא מאלים. אלאפע במי, גלא מאלים במא גלא מאלים. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> To put this use of acclamation in context we should recall, as Averil Cameron has noted, that Christianity whole heartedly appropriated the Second Sophistic traditions of public and communal acclamation, adapting them to religious and public liturgical contexts. Cameron observes, "…long into Byzantium, verbal acclamation was to remain a major part of public occasions." Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 83-84.

<sup>253 .</sup> השאר ל אלביז מנה שאה אלם המביז אוריזם . הישטא האיז היד משט מר Philoxenos of Mabbug, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 185.

similarly he urged his readers to do the same: "Stand in awe, oh discerning one, and wonder how the Word of God implanted Himself in the womb and took on a body, and became flesh."

### "When They Had Seen That He Was Born in Bethlehem": The Christological and Doxological Functions of the Nativity

Of the myriad examples of right worship which Philoxenos referred to in his polemics, he gave pride of place to the acts of worship and wonder which were made in response to Christ's nativity. Here again, Philoxenos followed Ephrem in citing the angels as an example for humanity, writing in the *Book of Sentences*: <sup>255</sup>

It is then a wonder which amazes not only men, but all of the heavenly hosts—that God could dwell in a womb... and descend as a child from a woman. These heavenly hosts, when they had seen that he was born in Bethlehem, it is written that they cried out praises there, as ones who were filled with amazement because they saw the wonder.<sup>256</sup>

<sup>254</sup> בביז מה ביו השלה הלשא האלה היב האלה מה בים מה בים מה בים מה בים מה בים האלה אלכם היב שלה Philoxenos of Mabbug, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 183.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> See for example Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity*, published as *Hymnen De nativitate*, ed. and trans. Edmund Beck, CSCO 82 (Louvain: Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1959), Hymn 21. (Though there is some doubt that this is authentic to Ephrem.) Philoxenos draws upon the angels even more than Ephrem; the latter tended instead to point to the magi as the examplary worshipers at the nativity.

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Likewise, the magi served a didactic purpose. Quoting from Chrysostom, Philoxenos noted approvingly, "The magi then not only worshiped, but also their riches were opened, and they were giving Him gifts. And the gifts were not as if to a man but as unto God."<sup>257</sup>

This allusion to the magi reveals half of the twofold polemical usage which

Philoxenos made of the nativity. On an immediate level, the nativity served in Philoxenos'

polemic as a summation of the incarnation as a whole. As such, he used the nativity stories to teach about the incarnation:

For how God "is" and where He "is" not one of the creatures is able to observe it. Not even angels or the rest of the spiritual beings (which are thought to be more subtle than we are) are able to fix their minds on the subtlety of his nature, because, although the angels are more subtle than we are, the one who made them is more subtle than they are....Thus the Seraphim thrice cried "Holy" and said in unison, "The heavens and earth are filled out of His glory." So what shall one say about His nature or where can one conceive of Him being? In the heavens? That is filled up out of His glory. On earth rather? That is also filled out of it! And because they are filled out of His glory, they do not suffice to contain him. For this passage proves it, "out of His glory" and not "His glory." For a little of His glory fills them and in their entirety, they are not enough to contain him.... And, as it is written, the angels proclaimed glory to God in the highest and peace on earth when He was born. But they did not all approach the subject of His nature."

Beyond this didactic function, however, was a doxological level of engagement with the nativity. <sup>259</sup> For Philoxenos, the nativity was more than just a theologically informative story, it was a locus and a model of worship:

The Word...became flesh which it was not. And it remained the thing which it was, God. And it is a wonder because it was each one of the things that it was. It is right also for us that we should hold both things in awe and faith, and not inquire concerning the mode of their existence, but to marvel in awe at their actions.... Thus the mystery is revealed and not explained (arabic). For the act is a marvel, and unspeakable from any angle: neither from the point of view that the virgin gave birth, nor from the point of view that God was born.<sup>260</sup>

Regardless of the angle of argument, Philoxenos was concerned to move his audience beyond an intellectual understanding of the incarnation to a liturgical and acclamatory relationship to it.

This intent is evident in one of his favorite diatribes—portraying his opponents as ignorant of the liturgical rites. This disingenous exaggeration, while not literally true (Habib was familiar with the controversy over the term "God-bearer"), served an important rhetorical function by allowing Philoxenos to remind his readers of the shared liturgical experience which bound them together and excluded heretics. So, in his *Phengitho Against* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> By "doxological," I mean that element of Philoxenos' Christology which continually returned to human engagement with the divine as its reference point.

*Habib*, Philoxenos took Habib to task for ignorance of the proclamation of Mary as Godbearer. He used both the nativity and its pursuant mention in the liturgy to prove his anti-dyophysite argument:

Philoxenos was purposely blustering. Use of the term "God-bearer" had long been a point of contention. <sup>262</sup> And while it had been affirmed as orthodox, Philoxenos made no effort to defend the term, rather he presupposed it as established ("not even [our] enemies are able to deny this"). <sup>263</sup> Instead of debating Christology, Philoxenos appealed to the liturgy to create a vision of the Church which had no place for dyophysite theology or even a dyophysite

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> On the earliest uses of the term see Marek Starowieyski, "Le titre θεοτόπος avant le concile d'Ephèse," *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989): 236-242; Maxwell Johnson, "Sub Tuum Praesidium: The Theotokos in Christian Life and Worship Before Ephesus," in *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Christology, Trinity and Liturgical Theology*, ed. Bryan Spinks (forthcoming).

 $<sup>^{263}</sup>$ ים באדבר האבים בא Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (IX-X), 332, 10%161.

theologian (e.g. Habib). <sup>264</sup> Here Philoxenos came full circle in his doxological approach to questions of Christology. <sup>265</sup> The appropriate response to the incarnation was to worship, and if anyone should have questions about the incarnation, the answers could be found by looking to the worship practices of the church (at least in the form which Philoxenos preferred to present them).

## "A COMMUNAL HYMN WHICH IS RECEIVED IN ALL THE CHURCHES OF ALL LANDS": THE TRISAGION AS TOUCHSTONE OF ORTHODOXY

Acclaiming the virgin as "God-bearer" had been sanctioned as a test of Cyrillian orthodoxy at Ephesus.<sup>266</sup> Nevertheless, the acceptance of the term at the Council of Chalcedon meant that it was not sufficient as an indicator of miaphysite orthodoxy. Accordingly, the miaphysites had bolstered their theological position through a spirited promotion of their preferred version of the *Trisagion*, the hymn which was sung by the congregation just before the Gospel reading.<sup>267</sup> This short hymn (in the miaphysite version) ran as follows:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> In this regard, Philoxenos marshaled the experience of the liturgy in a manner akin to what Fentriss and Wickham have called "the ordering and transmission of social memory." James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 41-86. Specifically, Philoxenos evoked the very familiar words and order of the liturgy so as to place Habib totally outside what was perhaps the most familiar experience that united late antique Christians. In reality, however, we should assume that Habib had been to church on occasion and most likely he had even heard liturgies that did not include the miaphysite *Trisagion* or the *theotokos*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> See note 259.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> It should also be noted that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed also served a similar function for Philoxenos. Luise Abramowski has shown how §11 of the *Letter to the Monks on Faith* is a commentary on the second article of the creed. Abramowski, "Aus dem Streit," 577-78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> For more details see Baby Varghese, West Syrian Liturgical Theology (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004); Sebastian Brock, "The Thrice-Holy Hymn in the Liturgy," Sobornost / Eastern Churches Review 7, 2 (1985): 24-34; Edith Klum-Böhmer, Das Trishagion als Versöhnungsformel der Christenheit: Kontroverstheologie im V. und VI.

Holy are thou, O God: Holy are thou, O Mighty: Holy are thou, O Immortal who wast crucified for us: have mercy upon us.

Holy are thou, O God: Holy are thou, O Mighty: Holy are thou, O Immortal who wast crucified for us: have mercy upon us.

Holy are thou, O God: Holy are thou, O Mighty: Holy are thou, O Immortal who wast crucified for us: have mercy upon us.<sup>268</sup>

The disputed addition of "who wast crucified for us," most likely occurred in Antioch under the Patriarchate of Peter the Fuller (d. 488) during Philoxenos' tenure there. This addition, while clearly polemical, was viewed as a clarification of what the miaphysites took to be the traditional interpretation, that the *Trisagion* was addressed to the Son alone as an acclamation of the incarnation.<sup>269</sup>

In his polemics, Philoxenos cited similar formulations by Ephrem as support for the antiquity of the theopaschite addition.<sup>270</sup> Interestingly for our inquiry here, Philoxenos also

Jahrhundert (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1979), 39-44. For a general introduction to the liturgy of St. James in the Syrian tradition see Baby Varghese, *The Syriac Version of the Liturgy of St. James: A Brief History for Students*, Joint Liturgical Studies 49 (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 2001).

268 Adapted from the translation in The Syriac Liturgy of St. James, in Liturgies, Eastern and Western: Being the Texts, Original or Translated, of the Principal Liturgies of the Church., trans. F. E. Brightman and C. E. Hammond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 75. The Syriac text is quoted by Philoxenos as אינים און אינים איני

269 Sebastian Brock has convincingly argued that this Christological address was originally a geographic variation rather than a theological one, see Brock, "Thrice-Holy Hymn," 29. More recently Bryan Spinks and Baby Varghese have argued for a reversal of Joseph Jungmann's view that miaphysite theology led to the introduction of ad Christum prayer in the West Syrian tradition. Instead, the miaphysite addition to the Trisagion should be seen as drawing on an existing tradition of prayer to Christ in support of a theological position, rather than vice versa. As we shall see, this fits well with Philoxenos' own position. Bryan Spinks, "Reflections On What Jungmann Omitted To Say," in The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Christology, Trinity and Liturgical Theology, ed. Bryan Spinks (forthcoming); Baby Varghese, "Christology, Trinity, and Liturgical Theology: Prayers Addressed to Christ in West Syrian Tradition," in The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Christology, Trinity and Liturgical Theology, ed. Bryan Spinks (forthcoming). For a general treatment of liturgical innovations and theological controversy in the fifth and sixth centuries, see Derek Kruger, "Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century," in The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian, ed. Michael Maas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 291-315.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Florilegium*, 114.

cited the following passage from Gregory Nazianzen in support of the miaphysite *Trisagion*: "Let he who does not worship the one who was crucified be anathema, and let him be numbered among the deicides!" For Philoxenos then, one's worship revealed one's Christology. This relationship was both descriptive and normative. Right worship, i.e. the miaphysite usage of the *Trisagion*, could indicate which Christians had the right understanding of Christ and which were heretical in their Christology. Moreover, this test was possible because, in Philoxenos' estimation, worship was normative for doctrine. For example, in the opening salvo of what became his long running polemical exchange with the monk Habib, Philoxenos cited the *Trisagion* as proof of Christ's divinity as if no further evidence was needed:

But by His nature, He (Christ) is immortal because He is God. Thus the whole church of God cries out in the hymn, "Holy are thou, O God: Holy, O Mighty:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> This is quite close to the tradition of *lex orandi, lex credendi* which was developing in Latin theology at the same time. See Paul De Clerk, "'Lex orandi, lex credendi': The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage," Studia Liturgica 24 (1994): 178-200. To make sense of this defense of liturgical tradition, a concept from liturgical theology may prove useful. Aiden Kavenagh has argued that in early Christian understanding, liturgy itself constituted a type of theology. In fact, he argues that liturgy was considered the primary type of theologia, that is words directed to God. Against this, Kavenagh asserts that what has become known as theology in the post-scholastic and post-reformation sense of speculative academic doctrinal theology would have been considered only a secondary type of theologia, that is merely words about God. It should be noted that Kavanagh is trying to make a normative argument within his own discipline about the true nature of theology. That part of his argument is irrelevant here. What is useful is his observation of the interaction between doctrine and liturgy in the late antique period. One need not accept Kavanagh's argument as being a universal or settled matter. It is enough to know that for some late antique authors in some situations perceptions of worship and devotion were normative in shaping doctrine. Liturgical contexts were not the only factors shaping Philoxenos' theology, but Kavanagh's analysis can be used on an ad hoc basis. For Philoxenos and perhaps for other miaphysite authors, the liturgical context held an imaginative and intuitive power over their conception of doctrine. As we shall see below, Philoxenos' appeals to practice and liturgy reveal just how powerfully such concerns could shape ones theology in the dauntingly complex Christological controversies. Aidan Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1984), 89-93.

Holy, O Immortal who wast crucified for us: have mercy upon us. This one then is the holy, mighty, immortal God who was crucified for us. And so the true Church believes and thus the tongues cry out moved by truth. <sup>273</sup>

In fact, when this argument was questioned in a response by Habib, Philoxenos at first refused to defend the miaphysite addition. He even went as far as to imply (by comparison with the use of a hymn in the polemics of Basil) that the miaphysite *Trisagion* could be considered "a communal hymn which is received in all the churches of all lands."

Beyond the supposed universality of the miaphysite *Trisagion*, Philoxenos also appealed to its acceptance by the faithful as a sign that it was not an innovation:

And if one should ask all the faithful who simply hold the mystery of the faith, they hold the view that Christ is God and together with that fact they hold that Christ was crucified. They also understand simply that God was crucified. (This thought that Christ is not understood to be God or that he should be divided in two, God and man, is found to come from the disease of heresy.) It is not, then, my word which troubles the simple as you have said, but these simple ones hold and believe thus themselves.<sup>275</sup>

<sup>275</sup> كومه كورس المرابعة المراب

This appeal to "simply hold the mystery of faith" is the same Evagrian anti-theological hermeneutic previously seen in Philoxenos' Biblical commentary. Grounding this simplicity of the faith in the liturgy provided a way for Philoxenos to engage his opponents doctrinally while simultaneously rejecting speculative theology. By appealing to the *Trisagion*, Philoxenos had a clear doctrinal statement whose source was not theological reflection (which was open to debate), but the established and received tradition of the church. Towards the end of his refutation of Habib, Philoxenos addressed the issue head on:

You [Habib] wrote "We establish the testimony to these things from the scriptures, and we do not establish our argument from a chorus as you do."

But, senseless one, you thought that I brought to my argument a proof taken from a hymn which is chanted in church because I did not have testimonies from scripture.... it is not because I lack proof from holy scripture or that the scriptures do not agree that God was crucified for us. For the scriptures do agree as do the preaching of the doctors, and the church of God cries it out in a hymn, that immortal God was crucified for us.

And there is no blame in the fact that I gave as a testimony to my argument a common confession of faith.... For I did not, O fool, send the hearers of my argument that they should learn from some other place that God immortal died, but rather that they should guard that which they already hold and that they should sing "Holy" as is their custom and they should say—as had been handed to them—and confess as they had received: "Holy are thou, O Immortal who wast crucified for us."

For Philoxenos, using the liturgy to settle issues of Christology was superior to dyophysite theological reflection, because it did not introduce sources of authority outside of the church. In Philoxenos' rhetoric, appealing to the liturgy merely referred the faithful to what they already knew to be true.

## "THE HOLY MYSTERIES SHOULD ALSO BE FOR YOU A DEMONSTRATION": LITURGIAL MYSTERY AS CHRISTOLOGICAL MIRROR

Philoxenos utilized the *Trisagion* as a ready description of the incarnate Christ, a theological and doxological norm which was embedded in the worship of the church. It was not, however, the most powerful Christological resource which he drew from the liturgy. The *Trisagion* was a description of the incarnation, but the liturgical mysteries of baptism, anointing, and the Eucharist served as actual microcosms of the incarnation.<sup>277</sup> In the *Book of Sentences*, Philoxenos argued:

Therefore, those things which are said about baptism and the holy mysteries should also be for you a demonstration concerning the fact that the one who was full emptied himself, and that the infinite one was limited, and that he who "was" deigned to "become", and that the one who begat was begotten...<sup>278</sup>

Later in the same work he elaborated how baptism was a demonstration:

And because it is hard to grasp in one's mind how it was possible that God became incarnate and yet remained what he was and how to acknowledge that what he was and that which he became are one and the same, all of this is confirmed by the fact

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> For a concise, but not exhaustive, survey of Eucharistic passages in Philoxenos see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 307.

that man becomes a son of God through baptism without giving up the fact that he is a man.<sup>279</sup>

This transformation of the Christian from bodily to spiritual through baptism served as a reverse model of how God, who while yet being spiritual, became bodily. In terms of his polemic, it is interesting to note that Philoxenos assumed this baptismal theology not only as a given, but also he appealed to it as a shared liturgical and spiritual experience, common to all of his audience. Philoxenos anchored his Christological polemic in what he considered to be universal interpretations of the liturgy. As with the *Trisagion*, he sought to avoid and end the abstract arguments of the Christological controversy through the tangible evidence of the liturgy. <sup>280</sup>

His Christological proof was, in fact, literally tangible. In his Commentary on the Prologue of John (written slightly after the Book of Sentences), Philoxenos made this appeal to both baptism and the Eucharist:

This is a demonstration set next to the act that the Word was not changed from that which He was when He became flesh—that each one of us became fully (

children of God in the womb of baptism, even though our nature is not changed from that which we are and we appear as men....

Also the holy mysteries that were handed on to us by Him teach us that He did not leave that which He was [God] when He became according to our properties [which He did not possess]. "He took the bread and He blessed it and broke it and gave it to his disciples. And He said, "This is my body." And again He also took the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> Here we should recall his claim about the *Trisagion* as being sung in the churches of all land. ... אלה בבל האלה בלאה Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Memre Against Habib (IX-X)*, 332, 10§158. See the discussion above.

cup and did the same thing and said, "This is my blood." And he called body that thing which appeared to be bread and again also blood that which tasted like wine. And just as all of the elements were what they had become, they did not depart from what they were known to be before as if they could not be seen, or touched, or tasted. So also neither did the Word, when it became flesh, leave the fact that it was God.<sup>281</sup>

It is what Philoxenos took for granted rather than what he hoped to prove which is relevant here. He assumed that his readers would universally agree to this understanding of the real presence in the elements. He then wanted his audience to apply the intellectual grounding of their belief in the real presence to belief in the incarnation as interpreted by miaphysite Christology. This move should be seen as a hermeneutical shift. Consistent with the general theme of his *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, Philoxenos wanted his hearers to approach the mystery of the incarnation through faith rather than inquiry and explanation. In Philoxenos system, if faith was sufficient grounding for belief in the liturgical mysteries, then it could be sufficient for Christology:

For it is not permissible to ask how He was when he had not yet become [man], or how He became [man] while immutable. For the act of the inhomination is a wonder and it is not the custom of a wonder to be inquired into or explained (arabb). And that is not only the case for this wonder which is thought to have come about [lit. become] in God, but also those wonders which were done or are done in all the rest of the creatures.... For there are other spiritually perceptible wonders, those which are repeatedly coming about [lit. becoming] in the church. They are by no means understood by men. But they are believed only: the water which became

baptism, the oil which took holiness.... And we believe that they became these things. How they became is not understood. And the simple bread becomes holy body and the usual drinking wine becomes precious blood. And we affirm that these things become such. How they become so is not known to us. Just as we affirm that all of the things, which were mentioned, have become and are becoming those things which was written about them...so also it is right to believe that the Word also became flesh as it was written.<sup>282</sup>

Philoxenos' appeal to the liturgy was a practical extension of the hermeneutics of faith and simplicity which he advocated as an alternative to theological controversy. As in the case of the *Trisagion*, Philoxenos had found a way to establish the miaphysite theological position without resorting to the sort of theological reflection which he pilloried as illegitimate in his opponents. In addition, this appeal to the liturgy also kept the elaboration of doctrine "within" the collective understanding of the church by appealing to beliefs that were already held.

For Philoxenos, an important function of this intuitive emphasis on faith was that it brought to an end the cycle of inquiry which he feared could devolve into an infinite infinite regress. In the *Book of Sentences* Philoxenos warned:

And if a Jew or Pagan comes to you and—asking to learn from you the mysteries celebrated inside the Church—says: "How is it possible that that water can be a womb from which men might become born again, and oil be power, and bread be body and wine be blood? And how can those who are baptized in it and who are

nourished be considered sons of God and from bodily beings be considered spiritual?" There is no clear demonstration which you may offer to persuade them. But, I think you may say that it is right for men to hold such things through faith alone and to be sure that it is easy for God to do all things.<sup>283</sup>

In an Evagrian sense, faith was the beginning of knowledge.<sup>284</sup> If the inquirer was asking questions outside of faith, then no answer would satisfy. In such a case Philoxenos advocated taking a different approach. Since there are no demonstrations which will succeed, the interlocutor should instead be shown his foolishness:

And if he strives to inquire after he hears this from you, that it was God who did such things, then you should consider him not only an unbeliever and worthy of contempt, but also a fool and an ignoramus, for it is not possible to discern or understand such things if it is God who has done them. It is not right to argue against God's acts nor to say to God: "How can these things come about (lit. become).<sup>285</sup>

As we shall see, methods for demonstrating the foolish nature and dangerous consequences of theological speculation added a second dimension to Philoxenos' polemical use of the liturgy.

or  $\angle i$  is in the point of motion of Mabbus, Book of Sentences (CSCO 9), 123.

# "HE WHO DISTINGUISHES CHRIST INTO TWO, DOES NOT WORSHIP THE TRINITY": WRONG DOCTRINE AND WRONG WORSHIP

Having established that right worship should lead one to right doctrine, Philoxenos also availed himself of the corollary. The wrong doctrine of the dyophysites would lead them to wrong worship. Since the proper approach to Christ and to the incarnation was an attitude of reverence, dyophysite theology with its spirit of critical inquiry was bound to be disruptive of worship. Following a similar argument made by Apollinarius, Philoxenos pointed out that making a distinction between the human and the divine in Christ would introduce a fourth member into the trinity (i.e. composing the trinity of the Father, God the Son, the Holy Spirit, and Christ the Man). This "quaternity" (¬\docsarrow\docsarrow\docsarrow) was a frequent focus of Philoxenos' polemics, including in his dispute with Habib and the Book of Sentences. It's implications for worship were also sharply put to use in these short polemical barbs from Philoxenos' First Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol (which like the exchange with Habib was written in the early 480s): "He who distinguishes Christ into two, does not worship the Trinity.... He who says that the person of a man who was not God was made God, sets up an idol, forms an image, and makes a new god."

Philoxenos also raised a second criticism against the dyophysite "quaternity." Not only did dyophysite doctrine lead the faithful astray by introducing "strange" (meaning idolatrous) new objects of worship, it also served to confuse the models of right worship

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> See the discussion in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 361 n. 37.

given in scripture. Some examples of this objection from Philoxenos' works were collected into polemical catena in 569 by deacons at the monastery of St. John of Nairab.<sup>288</sup> Among the pithy citations from Philoxenos in the manuscript, one finds these Philoxenian questions for the interrogation of "Nestorians":

III. If two natures be defined in Christ, which of the two did the magi worship?

X. If He Who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate is to be worshipped rightly, not only by us, but also by the celestial hosts, does He not receive this worship as God? <sup>289</sup>

We should not be surprised to find Philoxenos falling back here on his preferred scriptural paradigms for worship: the magi and the angelic hosts. Just as both had stood as counter examples to theological speculation, they could also serve as examples of how the dyophysite tendency toward theological precision could divert right worship. For Philoxenos, the point of this *reductio ad absurdum* was that the dyophysite theological distinctions would distract or even misdirect the worship of the faithful.

In another fragment preserved in the same catena manuscript, Philoxenos explained this criticism:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>288</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Against Those Who Divide Our Lord*, in MS BL Add. 14597, fols. 105v-107v. Unfortunately, these catena selections from Philoxenian writings cannot be dated. The *terminus ante quem* of 569, however, which makes it likely that they are authentic. Nevertheless, they are very similar in rhetoric and content to Philoxenos' *Letter to the Monks on Faith* which provoked the dispute with Habib. Accordingly, it is appropriate to introduce them as parallel evidence here. On the manuscript from St. John of Nairab, see de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 185-187; Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 648b-651a.

If there are two natures of Christ, a Divine nature and a human nature, then there is not one worship for both of them. For if the human nature is accounted to be outside the Divine Nature, when you worship the Divine Nature you do not worship the human nature. And if you do not worship it, it must be something different [from the Divine Nature], and if it is different, it must be a creature. And if you consider that human nature equal in worship, while at the same time you account it to be different from the divine nature, then it is the case that you worship the creature with the creator! But if in the worship of God, His flesh is worshipped, then the nature of the incarnate God is one and His flesh is not numbered different from Him.<sup>290</sup>

Philoxenos reasoned this way: dyophysite doctrine was incompatible with worship of the incarnate Christ, but if God in the flesh was indeed worthy of worship (as was assumed to be universally agreed between Chalcedonians and miaphysites) then the miaphysite Christology was the necessary explanation of why the incarnate Christ ought to be worshiped as God. For Philoxenos, wrong doctrine would lead to wrong worship, but right worship would lead to right doctrine. And in both cases, it was by the liturgical practice that he rendered a verdict on the Christological position.

# "So Also You Blaspheme against the Mysteries Which He Has Given Us": Separating God from Man

Having established that dyophysite doctrine was incoherent, Philoxenos went even further to depict it as having a malevolent effect. He claimed it uncoupled the link between

God and humanity which was proffered in the mysteries of the liturgical rite. Both the Eucharist and baptism were jeopardized by the dyophysite theology and communion.

As was the case with most of his arguments, this was a polemic with a pedigree. Henry Chadwick and Patrick Gray, among others, have shown that soteriological concerns over the Eucharist were a driving force behind Cyril's visceral reaction to Nestorius' Christology more than half a century earlier. Philoxenos shared these concerns and at worst suspected his dyophysite opponents of denying Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Setting aside the issue of the accuracy of his suspicions, we find Philoxenos making just this charge against Habib. In replying to the accusation of having created a "quaternity," Habib had resorted to a liturgical argument similar in structure, if not content, to that of Philoxenos:

For the body was assumed only for the completion and the *oikonomia* [of salvation]. For neither are the purple robes an addition to the king, although he is worshiped in them, nor are the temple and the one who dwells in it [related in that way]. So also we call the holy bread the body of the son of God, but not because it is an addition to his body which was assumed from the race of the house of David, as if there were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>291</sup> Henry Chadwick, "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 2, pt. 2 (1951): 129-44; Patrick T. R. Gray, "Rethinking the Trial of Eutyches: Constantinople, 448" (paper presented at Program in Hellenic Studies Seminar, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., February 8, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>292</sup> As Abramowski has noted, Philoxenos misconstrues the nature of Habib's position. Habib did teach two hypostases, but did not teach two prosopa as Philoxenos charged, Abramowski, "Aus dem Streit," 632. On this question see also de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>293</sup> Appealing to the liturgy was not, then, exclusive to Philoxenian polemic. Habib also seemed to think that at least some disputed points of theology could be clarified by appealing to what was assumed to be a common understanding of the liturgy. As noted above, in the case of Philoxenos' appeal to reverence, many of Philoxenos' polemical tactics were shared by his opponents.

two bodies! But this one is established for the memory of that one. In the same way that body which was assumed was assumed only for the *oikonomia* of the Word.<sup>294</sup>

While Habib looked to the liturgy to explain doctrine, his competing understanding of the liturgy proved to be a source of alarm for Philoxenos. They clearly did not share a common understanding of the Eucharist. Given Philoxenos' view that wrong doctrine led to wrong worship, this was as he expected. He wrote in response to Habib:

But in the same way that you have blasphemed against the person of Christ [with the doctrine of two natures and two persons], so you also blaspheme against the mysteries which he has given us. For he who takes that holy bread is not permitted to think in that moment—as you suggest—that the bread which is taken is a memorial of a different body (than God's).

As might be expected, Philoxenos and Habib were at cross purposes. While Habib (at least as can be discerned from limited context) was looking to safeguard Christ's divinity from being impinged upon by Christ's humanity, Philoxenos was concerned with preserving ineffable points of contact between humanity and divinity, both in the incarnation and in the Eucharist.

In his retrospective *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, Philoxenos elaborated on how the faithful had access to God through the incarnation of the Eucharist:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>295</sup> They are in real disagreement. Nevertheless, Philoxenos seems to be particularly pugnacious or even willfully malicious in his reading of Habib's response.

...it became His own flesh which He took from us and not that of another man who is considered separate from Him.

For this reason also, we confess that we take the living body of the living God, and not the simple body of a man who is mortal. And we receive the living blood of life in every holy sip and not the simple blood of a man subject to decay *such as* one of us—as is thought by the heretics.... He called the bread, body and the wine, blood. It was not *that* of someone else but His very own. And who is it that says these things? He who, after a short while, was about to be crucified.... He whose side was pierced by the lance of the soldiers, and it is written that blood and water fell from it—baptism and at the same time atoning blood. For through water, baptism was indicated and through blood, the divine mysteries...<sup>297</sup>

In short, as he explained in the letter which provoked his dispute with Habib, the paradoxical union of human and divine in the incarnation was reflected in the Eucharist: "Invisible, we see him; intangible, we handle him; though He cannot be eaten, we consume Him; not capable of being tasted, we drink him."

The Eucharist was not the only mystery which Philoxenos saw as threatened by dyophysite theology. Just as dyophysite theology contradicted the link between divinity and humanity in the Eucharist, for Philoxenos, it also threatened to breach the access to divine sonship which was available in baptism:

...if he who took on flesh is not God, but a mere created man, then we do not receive the Holy Spirit in baptism, moreover what we believe is false, namely that he was conceived without union and born of a virgin, so that our faith is vain and our hope lacking...if he who was born a human of Mary is not considered to be God incarnate on our behalf. Nor is [our] birth by him through baptism made to be true, unless first his nativity is believed to be through grace and of the woman. For because he was naturally born a son of the virgin, we also in baptism through grace are made sons of God.<sup>299</sup>

This distress over the absence of the Holy Spirit from dyophysite baptism led to, perhaps, the greatest of Philoxenos' liturgical arguments. In linking Christological heresy to fears about the departure of the Holy Spirit from the believer, Philoxenos developed a powerful rhetorical weapon.

## "As a Result of the Holy Spirit Overshadowing Them": The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Liturgy

We have already caught in the quotation above a brief glimpse of how Philoxenos saw the role of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy. It was on this basis that Philoxenos sounded his third and gravest alarm—that dyophysite theology would, by definition, cut off the faithful from the presence of the Holy Spirit in the rite. Philoxenos argued that Christ's incarnation and the Holy Spirit's indwelling were related. Denial or misconstrual of the former prevented the occurrence of the latter in the mysteries. Taking this idea to its logical conclusions, Philoxenos presented the rhetorically powerful argument that the dyophysite heresy was an active opposition of the work of the Spirit in the church.

To get the full sense of Philoxenos' polemic, we should begin by briefly considering the role he saw the Spirit performing in the rite. Fortunately, this has largely been done by Sebastian Brock who has discussed Philoxenos in several of his general surveys of Syriac spirituality and pneumatology.<sup>300</sup> Brock highlights this passage in the *Book of Sentences* in which Philoxenos explains the role of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy:

What can one say about those Mysteries that are performed in the Church? Although by outward appearances they involve ordinary species, yet as a result of the Holy Spirit overshadowing [ them, they receive a supernatural power. The water becomes a womb which makes human beings spiritual instead of just bodily; the oil takes on a sanctifying power, which anoints and sanctifies both soul and body; the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of God who became inhominate. Whoever is baptized and nourished with these is someone who has been created anew.... Who is capable of perceiving these wondrous changes with the eyes of the body? Who can speak of them in a fitting way? For in the short time during which someone goes down to the water to be baptized, at the invocation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they are born anew: they strip off the old person that they were, and they are renewed, becoming once again the New Person, after the likeness of the [Second] Adam who was from heaven, who for this very reason was inhominate and was born of the Virgin so, that He might effect our rebirth from the baptismal font—a second mother—as new children for God the Father.<sup>301</sup>

<sup>300</sup> Sebastian Brock, The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition, 2d ed. (Pune, India: Anita Printers, 1998); Sebastian Brock, Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition, 2d ed., Moran 'Etho' 2 (Kottayam, Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005); Sebastian Brock, Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Variorum, 2006). The following are also noteworthy: Emmanuel Kaniyamparampil, The Spirit of Life: A Study of the Holy Spirit in the Early Syriac Tradition (Kottayam, Kerala, India: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 2003); Emmanuel Pataq Siman, L'Expérience de l'esprit par l'Église d'apres la traditionne syrienne d'Antioche (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971). Paul Harb's short study focuses on Philoxenos specifically. Paul Harb, "La Conception pneumatique chez Philoxène de Mabbūg," Meltho 5, 1 (1969): 5-16.

מנא הי אם מלך הוא המלי הבל בהלא ממלבין מיבא מללא למאמי. מלין 106
הבי למל שלא אילימים אהצא צעומא, ביו המלץ ימיא הממהצא בלומים. ממבלין שלא הלבל
מן ביוא ממנא ממטי בימא מהא הבבה לבנוצא שלם בלהא המנא ממאי מעלא מסקצוא
האבשה מצע ממסקנג לנפצא מלפליא. מלשמא משמיא. פליא מהמא האלמא האלכינג ממי
הבחלין במיה מכן שלין מללימא. אילימי כינצא האלכי, מן הוג ממימא איל הבלהמילא
מהלא מן בליא מין מללימא. אילי מון במילא הלישא. בבינא הפליא עוץ. אם מני
הבליים איל מא המלא מין למאמי. בבינא לי ובמיא מו הבש לביא עול מו הבמה.
מבלילא האכא מהביא מהבא מק הוג מללה. צל מי, האלממי, מוא האב מלל מהא
ממלימה ממוא מו הוצא עולא. איל המולא האהמ המן צמביא מו האב מלל מהא

For our purposes here, this passage illustrates both the active role which Philoxenos saw the Holy Spirit performing in the liturgy and the connection he drew between that work of the Spirit and the access of the faithful to new life in Christ through baptism.<sup>302</sup>

In his discussion of Philoxenos' view of baptism, Brock has noted that the Syriac tradition represents a conflation between a "Johannine" emphasis on baptism as rebirth and a "Pauline" interpretation of baptism as death and resurrection. Philoxenos tended toward the Johannine imagery, following Ephrem and earlier Syriac theologians who had richly developed the image of baptism and anointing as a rebirth or nativity. For Philoxenos it was part of the symmetry of the incarnation. Just as Christ was born of Mary, so the baptized were born of the Spirit and became sons of God. In his commentary on Luke 3:22-23, Philoxenos explained:

For on this account he became man, to make us sons to his Father. He was manifested a corporeal (being) to change us to his spirituality. He was born of a

<sup>302</sup> Also of note is Philoxenos' phrase "the Holy Spirit is the soul of our soul" in the Memre on the Faith by Questions and Answers: באים מה המבין מה רצים מה המבין וווער באסוד וווער באסוד וווער באסוד וווער באסוד וווער באסוד ווווער באסוד וווער באסוד וו

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>303</sup> Brock, Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition, 60-83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>304</sup> Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, published as *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate (Text)*, ed. and trans. Edmund Beck, CSCO 94 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1962), 7§5-6. There is a discussion of this theme and passage in Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 62-65.

woman that he might beget us of the Holy Spirit.... And whereas flesh receives a soul within the womb, in baptism the Holy Spirit is given to man... 305

The means of this rebirth was the water of baptism and also the holy myron. (As evident in the description which he gives of the rite in the *Book of Sentences*, Philoxenos used a liturgy with an early version of the Syriac dual-baptismal anointing). While these physical elements of the mysteries were important, it was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which made baptism a mystery. In an undated fragment (*Memra on the Faith by Questions and Answers*), Philoxenos went to great lengths to remind his readers:

The wetness of the water in which we are baptized and the oiliness of the anointing oil which anoints does not remain after our death, but the Holy Spirit, which is mixed with our bodies and our souls by oil and water, remains with us both in this life and after death, because He is our true baptism.<sup>307</sup>

In sum, for Philoxenos, the indwelling of the Spirit was the true and lasting effect of baptism.

With regard to this inhabitation of the Holy Spirit, Brock has noted that Philoxenos provides some of the earliest evidence for an interesting lexical development in which the verb (agger); to tabernacle, dwell, overshadow) moved from being an expression in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>306</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Book of Sentences (CSCO 9)*, 124. On the baptismal anointing in Philoxenos see Brock, *Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, 54, 209-221; Baby Varghese, *Les Onctions baptismales dans la tradition syrienne*, CSCO Subsidia 82 (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1989), 162-69.

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Peshitta translation of the Hebrew Bible referring to divine action to being used in the Christian liturgy to describe the action of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this took hold in several seventh-century and later liturgical prayers which introduced a neologism "tabernacling" ( in the epiclesis (the prayer invoking the Holy Spirit) of the Eucharistic liturgy. Brock has identified Philoxenos' usage of the term as an intermediary step in this development.

Brock's identification can be amplified beyond his initial observation.<sup>309</sup> When considered chronologically, Philoxenos' own use of the root shows the same development on a micro-scale. While Philoxenos did not use the substantive (ܐܘܩܩܩ) with direct reference to the liturgy, his uses of the term in other contexts are the earliest extant occurrences in West Syrian literature.<sup>310</sup> Moreover, his use of the term shows a chronological development bringing together the application of the term to the work of the Holy Spirit in both the incarnation and the liturgical rites.

<sup>308</sup> Sebastian Brock, "From Annunciation to Pentecost: The Travels of a Technical Term," in Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft SJ, ed. S. Parenti E. Carr, A.-A. Thiermeyer and E. Velkovska, Studia Anselmiana 110 (Rome: n.a., 1993), 76-78.

<sup>309</sup> Brock identifies the passages below, but does not draw the link in terms of development set out here. Brock, "Travels of a Technical Term," 76, 7. It is also interesting that Philoxenos did not use the term in either his Memra on the Faith by Questions or the fragment of his Commentary on Luke which covered the annunciation even though there would have been ample opportunity to do so. Cf. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memra on the Faith by Questions and Answers (Part I, Tanghe edition), 43; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on Luke (Memra on the Annunciation), published as "Der Sermo des Philoxenos von Mabbug De annuntiatione Dei Genetricis Mariae," ed. and trans. Paul Krüger, Orientalia Christiana Periodica 20, 1-2 (1954): 158.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>310</sup> Brock, "Travels of a Technical Term," 76, 78. Brock notes that the East Syrian author Narsai uses the term at about the same time as Philoxenos, though not with respect to baptism.

Philoxenos' use of the term to describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation was in recounting the conception of Christ. His earliest mention of in any text is in the Memre Against Habib where he uses it for the overshadowing of the Spirit upon Mary. In his Second Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol, which was written shortly after the Memre Against Habib, Philoxenos used to describe the incarnation as the "indwelling" of Christ in humanity. In both cases these occurrences parallel the use of the root verb to by the Diatesseron and the Peshitta for the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary in Luke 1:35 and the spiritual indwelling of Christ in John 1:14. It is this latter verse, usually rendered as Christ dwelt "among us" ( ), which Philoxenos employed as a piece of Christological evidence, preferring to translate it as Christ dwelt "in us" (meaning in humanity as a genus).

In Philoxenos' later Biblical commentaries (c. 507), we find the two usages unified in his exegesis of Christ's baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22-23). Christ's virgin birth and baptism were presented as types of the baptism and spiritual birth of all the children of God. Philoxenos then semantically tied together the role of the Holy Spirit in

<sup>311</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memre Against Habib (III-V), 502, 3\31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>312</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Second Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol, published as "La deuxième lettre de Philoxène aux monastères du Beit Gaugal," ed. and trans. André de Halleux, Le Muséon 96, 3-4 (1983): 67, §47-48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>313</sup> Brock, "Travels of a Technical Term," 71-74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>314</sup> See the discussion of this uniquely miaphysite interpretation in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 373-378.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>315</sup> Brock, "Travels of a Technical Term," 71-74; Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 392)*, 80-82.

Christ's conception and his baptism by applying the vocabulary of the former to the latter: "This [the spiritual rebirth of humanity] is the mystery which was fulfilled in the baptism of our Saviour, which (baptism) indeed the Father confirmed through his voice and the Spirit by his overshadowing (خكينه)"316 With this comment, Philoxenos lexically linked the work of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation to its presence in the mystery of baptism. While the appeal to the rite of baptism is implicit here, Philoxenos made it explicit in a passage we have already seen from the Book of Sentences: "What can one say about those Mysteries that are performed in the Church?...as a result of the Holy Spirit overshadowing [ them, they receive a supernatural power". 317 While Philoxenos did not go as far as the later West Syrian Eucharistic anaphorae which applied the term mbous to the action of the Holy Spirit in the rite, his use of the root kappa makes it clear that he considered the work of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation (overshadowing Mary) to be parallel to the work of the Spirit in the liturgy, both in the birth of the new child of God (indwelling in baptism) and in the faithful's access to the incarnate Christ in the Eucharist (overshadowing the elements). 318

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>316</sup> איסיס שלם ארא בא פוסם. האלים מוס האלים בא באר בא האלים מוס האלים בא שלים אולים אולי

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>318</sup> See the mention of similar Eucharistic usage by Jacob of Serug in Brock, "Travels of a Technical Term," 85.

# THE DENIAL OF GOD... IS A REBELLION AGAINST THE SPIRIT'S LORDSHIP": HERESY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT"

From this parallel understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in both the incarnation and the liturgy, Philoxenos shaped his most potent liturgical polemic. He concluded that if dyophysite theology denied the overshadowing of Mary by the Spirit (as was the case in the *homo assumptus* theology which Philoxenos imputed to Habib) then, by definition the dyophysites had cut off the faithful from the presence of the Holy Spirit in the rite. Philoxenos considered this alienation of the spirit to be a grave danger.

Such a charge may seem surprising since, as we have seen in chapter one, Philoxenos took a rather lenient view of what the Holy Spirit would tolerate (including clergy who "steal, commit adultery, defraud, plunder, and swear falsely"). In general, he downplayed concerns about grieving the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, at several points in his *Memra on the Faith by Questions and Answers* (a treatise dedicated to questions about the Holy Spirit), Philoxenos did allow one exception:

There is no sin which can deprive us of our baptism, not adultery, theft, fornication, false-witness, nor any other action, except the denial of God and fellowship with demons because the Holy Spirit distances itself from them and such like them and because the Spirit does not agree to remain where Satan dwells.<sup>320</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>319</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Memra on the Faith by Questions (Part II), fol. 104v.

The Holy Spirit would leave the believer in cases of apostasy. This exception is not surprising within the context of the Chalcedonian Christological conflicts. We have already seen Philoxenos make exactly this charge against the dyophysites in his *Letter to Abu Ya'fur*:

But after they [the dyophysites] had blasphemed [at the Council of Chalcedon] and torn the true faith and gone out of the sheepfold of life, they were excommunicated and rejected. The Holy Spirit did not remain with them but [instead] a spirit of error and of Satan. And they became devoid and stripped of baptism and of the priesthood and of every mystery of the true Church.<sup>321</sup>

The rhetorical effect of such a pronouncement upon his readers must have been marked. Questions about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit were of great concern in the period. In his *Memra on the Faith by Questions and Answers*, Philoxenos devoted the entire text (as preserved) to answering questions about the departure of the Spirit from sinful Christians. Severus of Antioch's letters show him responding to similar concerns about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

In these writings, Philoxenos and Severus were primarily concerned with assuring their audiences of the faithful indwelling of the Spirit. Accordingly, Philoxenos had to walk a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>322</sup> See the summary in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 276-78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>323</sup> See Letter 103, "Of the Holy Mar Severus from the Letter to Caesaria" in Severus of Antioch, *Collection of Letters*, 423-25.

fine line to justify this sole case in which the Spirit could be lost. In the Memra on the Faith by Questions and Answers, he made this distinction:

If it is allowed that we should say that the Spirit which we have received in baptism leaves the soul, it is because of sins such as these—or rather because of this wickedness, for it is not right to even call these sins because the denial of God by itself is not a sin so much as a rebellion against the Spirit's lordship and an enmity which battles against him.<sup>324</sup>

Philoxenos went on to compare the troubled soul to a city which has overturned its imperial statues. On the one hand, this might occur due to popular unrest, in which case the Emperor might grant clemency. On the other hand, if a usurper had led the revolt, the emperor would consider the turmoil to be a rebellion which must be crushed (Philoxenos had first-hand knowledge of this from having lived through two attempted rebellions in Antioch).

Philoxenos concluded by noting that the key question was not the behavior of the city (which is the same in both scenarios), but its statement of allegiance. The same is true for the soul. If it sins, the Holy Spirit can offer forgiveness, but if it submits to another lord then forgiveness is impossible. Philoxenos explained with this example:

When in our day, an unbaptized idolater or a Samaritan comes for holy baptism, even if they should not repent from their earlier evils, [by] the sole fact that they renounce Satan and confess Christ, they are counted among the just and in the realm of the kingdom of Christ...<sup>325</sup>

For Philoxenos, the key distinction was the conflict of allegiance between the Holy Spirit and Satan. His proof text for this distinction was 2 Corinthians 6:14-16:

For what communion have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Satan? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?<sup>326</sup>

In addition to the *Memra on the Faith by Questions and Answers*, Philoxenos also cited the pericope in his *Letter to the Monks of Senun*. Here his Christological polemic was even more explicit as he congratulated the monks on their faithfulness to the miaphysite cause:

For in as much as you heard the apostle crying, "What communion is there of light with darkness, and of the Christ with Satan, and of the believer with the unbeliever, and of the temple of God with that of demons," as wise disciples of the apostle, you separated yourselves from communion which was with those who are ministers of Satan and temples of demons. For these learned from the Accuser, considering Christ to be a simple man as also the Jews and heathen do. 327

While such vocabular of spiritual conflict was certainly part of Philoxenos' rhetorical flourish, it also reflected the pneumatology underlying his Christological polemic. Heresy threatened to overthrow the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in favor of Satan. The mechanism for doing so was denying the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation. The "denial of God" about which Philoxenos warned was both spiritual and literal. In his opinion, the dyophysites

 $<sup>^{326}</sup>$  2 Corinthians 6:14-16, English adapted from RSV: Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις · τίς γὰρ μετοχὴ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνομία, ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος; τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Χριστοῦ πρὸς Βελιάρ, ἢ τίς μερὶς πιστῷ μετὰ ἀπίστου; τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῷ θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων; (NA27). See below for Philoxenos' Syriac text of the pericope.

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had denied God in the humanity of Christ and as such had made themselves enemies of the Spirit. Christological speculation was not merely an intellectual matter; because of its spiritual implications, it was as serious and as dangerous as treasonous speech against a Roman emperor.

#### **CONCLUSION**

From a model for right doctrine to an endangered means of salvation, the liturgy played a prominent role in Philoxenos' polemic. His first appeal was to the liturgy as a substitute for Christological controversy. Against the incessant theological discussion and debate of the post-Chalcedonian era, Philoxenos called for an end to speculation and advocated in its place the reverent right worship of the incarnate Christ. This doxological focus took its cues from Biblical narratives (especially the nativity) and also from the liturgical practices of the church (such as the acclamations of the *theotokos*, the *Trisagion*, and the mysteries). From these sources, Philoxenos was able to craft doctrinal responses to the dyophysites without resorting to the very same form of theological discourse which he condemned in his opponents. Appeals to the liturgy also had several powerful advantages over more abstract arguments. They could claim to be based on universally accepted beliefs and thus be presented as free from competing interpretations. Similarly, as a shared experience, liturgical polemic could serve to bind together a group identity against heretics. Lastly, Philoxenos sought to use the liturgy (particularly the mysteries) as way to head off Christological inquiry and commentary. For those who had questions, the miracles of the

mysteries provided microcosms of the miracle of the incarnation. And for those who were not satisfied with such an explanation, no explanation would suffice.

Philoxenos' second liturgical polemic set out to show exactly how the dyophysite logic could never be satisfied, leading to endless contradiction and eventually liturgical self-destruction. On the surface, the dyophysite position confused and diverted worship from the incarnate Christ. It made the Biblical accounts of worship (such as the magi) incoherent and at its worst seemed to introduce a new object of worship, the merely human body assumed by Christ. This polemic, as exaggerated as it was, was only Philoxenos' first foray. His real condemnation of the dyophysite worship came from his conclusion that the dyophysite separation of humanity and divinity in Christ meant a similar separation between humanity and divinity in the mysteries. Those who took Christ's body and blood in the dyophysite Eucharist did not take the life-giving body of God, but a merely human body. So too in baptism, access to the Holy Spirit was threatened.

The implications of dyophysite theology for baptism and the role of the Holy Spirit in the rite provided Philoxenos with the third and most powerful of his rhetorical weapons. Building upon the rich Syrian baptismal tradition, Philoxenos drew a sharp link between the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation and the indwelling of the Spirit in baptism. He argued that the dyophysites, by denying the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation were also denying its role in baptism. Thus he portrayed their erroneous teaching about Christ's incarnation as a satanic effort to interrupt the Spirit's role in the oikonomia of salvation. This was an argument with broad rhetorical appeal. From the common liturgical experience of his

audience, Philoxenos was able to draw upon a common sacramental vision imperiled by the Christological heresies.

In short, his call to join the Christological controversies could be summed up as a call to join the struggle of the Holy Spirit against Satan. As we shall see in the next chapter, this is a rhetorical trope which Philoxenos developed fully in his ascetical writings.

# CHAPTER FIVE BEGINNING THE DISCIPLESHIP OF CHRIST: THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT AS ASCESIS AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

#### INTRODUCTION

Writing from exile in 521, Philoxenos made an impassioned appeal to the monks of the monastery of Senun to maintain the anti-Chalcedonian cause in his absence. He urged the monks to continue his doctrinal struggles, not merely for his sake, but as a crowning achievement to their own monastic labors:

But now, as I am hearing, you have also added apostolic service to your monastic lifestyle and also zeal for the orthodox faith to your tested righteousness. For it is fitting to the one who is wise in lifestyle, that to this one there should also be knowledge of the faith. [And it is fitting] for the one whose body is pure from lust that also his soul should be set free from strange worship [i.e. idolatry]. [And it is fitting] for he who was justified from sin through conflicts and toils, that also he should prevail over error through the wisdom which is given by faith. For you first humbled the fervor of the body and now, behold, you humiliate the arrogance of heretics...<sup>328</sup>

This appeal brings together two primary elements in Philoxenos' polemic: his effort to encourage monastic communities to join the controversy and his criticism of dyophysite Christology from the perspective of Christian practice. We have seen how he urged those seeking knowledge of God to oppose dyophysite Christology on the grounds that it threatened the access to God found in scripture reading and the liturgical mysteries.

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Philoxenos' conflation of ascetic and theological labor in his *Letter to the Monks of Senun* continues this same approach and invites us to look at his polemics within a broader context: how did Philoxenos construct the relationship between theological conflict and the ascetic life?

This chapter answers this question by situating three themes from Philoxenos' polemics within the Evagrian ascetic framework he presented in the *Discourses*. The three polemical themes are Philoxenos' dogmatic approach to affirming right doctrine (through creed, scripture, and liturgy), his rejection of human inquiry and speculation (such as commentary) in favor of a hermeneutic of simplicity, and, lastly, his use of spiritual combat as a lens for understanding the controversy. All three elements are readily evident in Philoxenos' ascetic method organized under the general rubric of the "contest of the spirit" (תשמי משל - השמיו השמיו השמיו או the internal spiritual battle which was undertaken in pursuit of the discipleship of Christ. 329 In this regard, Philoxenos' Christological polemic can be understood as drawing on a larger mystical system. Instead of emphasizing the distinction between Philoxenos' polemic and ascetic writings (which has often been made by modern scholars), this chapter uses the similarities of these two bodies of texts to offer an insight into Philoxenos' most powerful means for rallying supporters in the Christological controversies—lauding theological conflict as an ascetic practice to be undertaken as one step in the pursuit of spiritual perfection.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>329</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:12-16, 316.

This analysis serves to explain the observation made in the previous chapters—that for Philoxenos, heretical doctrine was more than merely a human misunderstanding of the relationship between God and man. Instead, he subsumed theological conflicts with 'heretics' as one category within a greater "contest of the spirit." For Philoxenos, heresy stood as an obstacle to the life of perfection which was the ultimate goal of Christ's disciples. In his ascetic system, attaining and keeping the true faith were integral and essential parts of the path to perfection and divine knowledge.

## DOGMA, DOCTRINAL INQUIRY, AND DEMONS: PHILOXENIAN POLEMIC OBSERVED

While in his episcopal administration, Philoxenos was capable of moderation, it is nevertheless true that the strident rhetoric of his polemical works reflects an unfailing commitment to the miaphysite understanding of Christ. Unlike his near contemporary Jacob of Serug, Philoxenos' position *vis-à-vis* Christ's nature was abundantly clear. The mour study of Philoxenian polemic in previous chapters, we have shown that Philoxenos sought to rally support against his dyophysite opponents by depicting Christological heresies as a threat to Christian practice (e.g. scripture reading and participation in the liturgical mysteries). From the rhetoric of these appeals to practice, three recurrent elements stand out for consideration as concepts which were informed by his vision of ascetic life. These three themes are: the use of dogmatic arguments in support of miaphysite doctrine (which we have seen in his appeal to simple faith in scripture and the mysteries); repeated objections to theological

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>330</sup> See for example the numerous confessions of faith which survive under his name. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 168-78. On the now resolved but previously uncertain position of Jacob of Serug see Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Moran 'Etho' 9 (Kottayam, Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1997), 37.

inquiry (which we have seen in his criticism of commentary and Christological explanation); and a tendency to interpret the conflict in terms of conflicts between opposing spiritual forces (which we have seen in his arguments regarding the absence of the spirit from the dyophysite rite). As we have already treated these three concepts to some degree, it will suffice to briefly review them here before examining their counterparts in Philoxenos' ascetic schema.

## **D**OGMA

In his study of Philoxenian theology, de Halleux enigmatically qualified Philoxenos' theology as corresponding to a "génie intuitif mais tumultueux.... toute la réflexion religieuse de Philoxène derive d'une intuition théologique fondamentale..." Although de Halleux did not elaborate in greater detail, one may catch a glimpse of this intuitive character in Philoxenos' dogmatic appeals in support of miaphysite Christology. The strongest examples are the many instances in which Philoxenos made a hyperbolic refusal to defend or explain his Christology. For example in the *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*, he proudly spoke of apprehending the mystery of Christ by faith alone:

For the *oikonomia* of God is an ineffable mystery, and we are not ashamed to confess (**TRUA**) that our doctrine is not understood or subjected to commentary (**DEPART)**, but in this do we the more boast, that we lay hold of a mystery which may not be comprehended by knowledge. And while all wisdoms and all doctrines

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>331</sup> The passage is found in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 311-14. I am grateful to Lucas Van Rompay, a former student of de Halleux, for indulging my lexical queries about some of the intriguing vocabulary that de Halleux used to describe Philoxenos. Van Rompay himself calls attention to the term "fruste" which de Halleux used elsewhere. Lucas Van Rompay, "Bardaisan and Mani in Philoxenus of Mabbog's Mēmrē against Habbib," (forthcoming).

may be investigated and understood, these things of ours remain in silence. They are only to be believed, because they are not to be understood.<sup>332</sup>

For Philoxenos the key to laying hold of the mystery of Christ was faith. Specifically, he considered faith to have access to Christ through three sources—the creed, scripture, and liturgy.

The role of faith in credal confession is perhaps the most ready example of what Philoxenos saw as the appropriate dogmatic approach to Christology. A creed was to be affirmed without justification and without making any exceptions. Thus in Severus of Antioch's *Prosphonesis* (of which Philoxenos was a prominent co-signer and perhaps also co-author) we find that a simple affirmation was made that the definition of the three hundred and eighteen fathers was the "one and only definition of faith" and that this definition did not admit the possibility of two natures in Christ after the union. <sup>333</sup> No defense or justification was presented in this proclamation. In general, Philoxenos simply asserted his doctrine as true, an article of faith which required no defense.

In addition to the Nicene Creed, scripture served a similar direct relationship in transmitting the mysteries to faith. Against the heretics, Philoxenos advocated not more explanation but less. His strict literal interpretation was part of this same dogmatic defense of the miaphysite Christology. We have already seen this sentiment in the Biblical

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<sup>333 :</sup> אמנים אים המתמנים אין אין עד איי עד איי איי Severus of Antioch, Prosphronesis, published as "Allocution prononcée par Sévère après son élévation sur le trône patriarcal d'Antioche," ed. and trans. M.A. Kugener, Oriens Christianus 2 (1902): 266.

commentaries and it can be found in his polemical tracts as well. In the *Book of Sentences* he wrote:

You should not doubt that God became man and experienced suffering and tasted death.... For it is right for you to believe these things for two reasons—because they are spoken in the scriptures and because they are written by God. And they should be a demonstration of faith for you... <sup>334</sup>

In other words, for Philoxenos scripture carried sufficient authority to ground faith. Just as with the creed, he deemed that nothing further was needed in addition to scripture to support one's belief.

A similar dynamic was at work in the liturgy as well. In his *Commentary on the Prologue* of *John*, Philoxenos frequently cited the mysteries of the liturgy as parallels for the mystery of the incarnation. In one particular passage, he explained how the act of faith in each mystery was also analogous as a wonder:

And as each one of us fills his mind with wonder, let us increase in faith instead of inquiry (محمد ) and instead of doubt, the assurance which is in the confession (محمد ) which is fitting to the mysteries.

In his schema, he considered that for all three sources of faith—the creed, scripture, the mysteries— "confession" was all that were needed. All one must do is confess Christ, or as Philoxenos explained to the monks of Beth Gogol:

I say with Paul: "I confess Christ Jesus...." In the name of Christ I implore and testify. To what end? So that we might remain in the simplicity of faith which draws near to God, and so that we might guard ourselves from the wicked doctrines invented by false men.<sup>336</sup>

Ultimately, miaphysite doctrine was construed as a matter received from the traditions of the church. While Philoxenos thought the believer needed to guard himself against the heretics, he held that faith itself needed no defense. Indeed, faith served as the antidote to heresy.

To be more precise, Philoxenos often placed faith in opposition to "error"

(木んこう), warning his audience that to abandon faith for the sake of human knowledge or commentary was certain to lead to error. He advocated that the right path was to return to the profession of faith shared by the church. Thus he put forward this *modus operandi* against Habib: "Let us reply to him simply from the word of the confession which is common to us and to him [i.e. the Nicene Creed]." Given his dogmatic view of faith, Philoxenos thought that replies to a heretic ought to be made from the confession of faith not in addition to it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>337</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 22, 59.

### **DOCTRINAL INQUIRY**

Closely linked to Philoxenos' dogmatic defense of miaphysite doctrine was his rejection of doctrinal inquiry. In his *Commentary on the Prologue of John* he warned:

It is not even allowed to begin inquiry (حمص) or investigation (حمص) concerning Him [the Creator], it is permissible only to believe that He exists and that He entirely does not fall subject to seeking (حمل), or knowledge, or speech.

Against inquiry, Philoxenos posed one of his key concepts, simplicity ( how ). We have already seen about how simplicity was presented as the means of preserving faith in the face of heresy. For Philoxenos, such simplicity stood in opposition to the speculative inquiry which was the primary cause of Christological heresy:

How is it that someone could not seek to receive the doctrine concerning the divine mysteries...as a child, but instead foolishly make a spectacle of oneself and strive to judge and inquire into those things which it is right to take up only by the faith and simplicity which accompany youth?<sup>340</sup>

האבים בבים האוטים מבאה אינים ברות : אינים במסבים האבים בבים האבים במאי. אינים פרל באלים Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 85.

need for craftiness of words and the invention of thoughts." <sup>341</sup> Of particular note here is the moral vocabulary which Philoxenos used to describe the heretical opinions. The terms trickery (ܐܩܩܩܩܐ) and cunning (¬ܩܩܩܩܐ) were morally charged, indicating the insidious intent behind heretical opinions.

#### **DEMONS**

In his allegations of insidious intent behind heresy, Philoxenos did not mince words. We have caught a glimpse already of the vehemence with which he treated the inquiry and speculation of the dyophysites. In addition to moral censure, he had an even more powerful condemnation. Drawing on a demonology which had been developing since the earliest Christian literature, Philoxenos portrayed his theological opponents as serving a Satanic scheme against the true faith. Thus in his *Second Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol*, he concluded a long discussion of dyophysite Christology with this condemnation: "Satan invented these phrases of wickedness that through each of these rash ones he might trouble the serenity of the simple." Such a spiritual outlook was the norm for Philoxenos' polemics, occurring in nearly every work. Dyophysites were consistently labeled as "devils ("irxx)," "disciples"

<sup>341</sup> המלה בישלה בישלה הליבה האמשה: הכלים בישלה הליבה בישלה ב

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>343</sup> Interestingly, this rhetoric is present on only one occasion in the *Commentary on the Prologue of John*. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380)*, 220. Nevertheless that passage is consistent with the point being made here. There are also two references in his *Commentary on Matthew and Luke*. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Commentary on Matthew and Luke (CSCO 392)*, 27-29.

of devils (حمتیم جیتهه),"<sup>345</sup> and "ministers of the Accuser ( مادخید)."<sup>346</sup>

This demonology served to reinforce the battle lines drawn in Philoxenos' anti-Chalcedonian polemics. At the most basic level, Philoxenos followed 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 and used the simple logic that if his opponents were opposed to Christ (as the miaphysites defined him), then they must be laboring for Satan. We have already seen such an argument at work in his polemics concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy.

Philoxenos' approach varied. At times, his mention of demonic opposition was a passing remark.<sup>348</sup> At other times it became an elaborately developed demonology, such as in this litany of anathemas from his *First Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol*:

He who says that, in the one person of Christ, there are the Giver and the Receiver, one giving mercy and the other receiving mercy, and does not confess that He is altogether the Giver and the Distributor of good things to others, is filled with the evil of the devil...

He who says that Christ was justified by His works, and became the equal of the Most High by the practice of His virtues, and that He is not exalted and is not God

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>344</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, First Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol, 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>345</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks on Faith (Vaschalde edition), 131.

<sup>346 &</sup>quot;Therefore, those who anathematize the [dyophysite] heretics are not anathematizing bishops but [they are anathematizing] people who have become ministers of the Accuser." מבגע של האלים ביילים ביילים

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>347</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Commentary on the Prologue of John (CSCO 380), 220.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>348</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, First Letter to the Monks of Beth Gogol, 149.

by His nature, such a one is without any virtue and is filled with the malice of the devil...

He who says that He Who cast out Legion from the man [in the Gospel] is one, and He Who was comforted by the Angel at the time of His passion, another, in such a one dwells Legion whom Jesus drove out.

He who does not confess that glory and humiliation are of one Son, Who is one person and one nature Who was embodied, such a one is himself an embodied devil.<sup>349</sup>

Such formulaic utterances served to create a repetitive and stark delineation of the theological sides in the Christological dispute.

Philoxenos' intention was polemical. If the heretics were indeed demons and agents of demons, then he would allow no fellowship with them. We have already seen in the preceding chapter how he based this logic on the proof text of 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 in his Letter to the Monks of Senun:

For in as much as you heard the apostle crying: "What communion is there of light with darkness, and of the Christ with Satan, and of the believer with the unbeliever, and of the temple of God with that of demons," as wise disciples of the apostle, you separated yourselves from communion which was with those who are ministers of Satan and temples of demons. For these learned from the Accuser, considering Christ to be a simple man as do the Jews and heathen.<sup>350</sup>

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In short, for Philoxenos, the dyophysites were not merely the victims of theological carelessness; they had joined forces with the deceiver himself.

One can often glimpse specific polemical aims which were furthered by the demonological framework Philoxenos had constructed. For example in Philoxenos' verdict on the absence of the Holy Spirit from the dyophysite rite, he was making a statement about dyophysite ordinations. We have also seen a similar argument in his *Letter to the Lector Maron of Anazarbus* where Philoxenos argued that anathematizations of dyophysite clergy were acceptable:

And just as the serpent was cursed because of the one who spoke through him, so also it is right to anathematize the heretic as a minister of the Accuser.... And as it is known that Satan is at work in all heretics, and they are vessels of his service, then for the same reason that the serpent was cursed before, so also now every one of the heretics should be anathematized, whether known [as a heretic] in life or after death.<sup>351</sup>

Philoxenos made a related usage of clergy in Satan's service in his *Letter to the Monks* of *Palestine*, where he condemned Flavian of Antioch's Christological wavering as a vain attempt to toil on behalf of both Christ and Satan. <sup>352</sup> It is easy to see how Philoxenos hoped such language would reinforce the sharp theological dichotomies he wished to draw.

المعسى عجم به مشقة مناه Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of Senun (CSCO 231), 35.

<sup>352.</sup> جميم الحسيم منحن Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter to the Monks of Palestine, 35.

Moreover, it could serve as a not so subtle prod to the vacillating monastic communities which Philoxenos hoped to persuade to join the miaphysite side.

From the preceding Chapters, the outline of Philoxenos' polemic becomes apparent. For Philoxenos, right doctrine was a matter of faith. He considered its appropriate sources to be the creed, scripture, and the liturgical mysteries. While faith itself was not a matter of debate and needed no defense, Philoxenos portrayed the faithful as being threatened by the forces of error. The principle threat was that the insidious nature of such heretical inquiry about God would disrupt their simplicity, a virtue which Philoxenos praised as integral to faith. Moreover, Philoxenos considered this threat as more than a mere intellectual pitfall, it represented a Satanic initiative to corrupt the faithful. As we shall see, this allusion to spiritual opposition was quite similar to Philoxenos' general ascetic system. Indeed, his polemics found a counterpart in his ascetic works.

## THE DISCIPLESHIP OF CHRIST AND THE CONTEST OF THE SPIRIT: PHILOXENOS' ASCETIC SYSTEM

As we begin our comparison of Philoxenos' polemics with his ascetic writings, it should be noted that to do so runs counter to the trend in modern scholarship, where Philoxenos' reputations as an ascetic writer and as a polemicist have taken on a Jekyll and Hyde relationship. For example, William Frend condemned Philoxenos as "rabidly puritanical." But with regard to Philoxenos' ascetic writings, Eugène Lemoine had

<sup>353</sup> Apparently unaware of Philoxenos' appeals to *oikonomia*, Frend goes as far as to condemn him as "a rigorist who interpreted anti-Chalcedonianism with 'accuracy' [Ἀκρίβεια?]" W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 215.

championed them as gems of the monastic tradition and "parfaitement orthodoxe," noting that "l'erreur christologique, les formules christologiques inadmissibles n'ont aucune influence sur leur enseignement ascétique et mystique."<sup>354</sup> Lemoine's observations are understandable, given that, as de Halleux noted, the *Discourses* have a serene and neutral tone befitting their genre.<sup>355</sup>

We are misled, however, if we interpret this distinction in genre between polemic and paranaesis as an indication of some sort of ideological break in Philoxenos' writings. The commonality of Evagrian terminology in both Philoxenos' understanding of the Christological controversies and in his monastic vision reveals how closely Philoxenos associated the two endeavors. This evidence, coupled with an understanding of Philoxenos' views on spiritual combat, leads us to the conclusion that for Philoxenos, doctrinal conflict was a form of ascesis.

Before taking up the three themes we have identified from his anti-heretical polemics (i.e. dogma, critique of an inquiring hermeneutic, and spiritual struggle), we should consider

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>354</sup> These words are those of Hausherr quoted approvingly but out of context by Lemoine in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Lemoine translation)*, 25. For Hausherr's original remarks, which refer to Lebon's interpretation of monophysitism and not to the *Discourses* specifically, see Hausherr, "Contemplation et sainteté," 173.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>355</sup> De Halluex described the *Discourses* as having a "ton serein et neutre, conforme au genre parénétique" de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 287.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>356</sup> While de Halleux does not do this explicitly, his division of Philoxenos' *oeuvres* between "oeuvres dogmatiques" on the one hand, and "oeuvres morales, spirituelles et liturgiques" on the other hand, does lend itself to bifurcation. He is, however, too careful a reader of Philoxenos not to notice that themes of miaphysite doctrine are evident or assumed in several passages of the *Discourses*. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 567-68 and 287.

(styled as both (styled as monastic exhortation. If indeed they were preached, they would have been given in a monastic setting. While Philoxenos' authorship is established, the date is uncertain. It is likely the *Discourses* date from the middle point of his career. In terms of their circulation and copies (already numerous in the sixth century), de Halleux has noted that the *Discourses* surpass Philoxenos' polemics as his enduring legacy to the miaphysite Syrian Christian tradition. For our purposes, we should also note that they sealed his reputation, even within his own lifetime, as a significant teacher of piety and ascessis. Soo

<sup>357</sup> In addition to Budge and de Halleux, the relevant introduction to the Discourses is found in Philoxenos of Mabbug, Discourses (Lemoine translation). Important correctives to Lemoine's edition are Hausherr, "Philoxène en version française," 171-85; J. Gribomont, "Les Homélies ascétiques de Philoxène de Mabboug et l'echo du Messalianisme," L'Orient Syrien 2, 1 (1957): 419-32; Robert Kitchen, "The Development of the Status of Perfection in Early Syriac Asceticism, with Special Reference to the Liber Graduum and Philoxenus of Mabbug" (D.Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1997); Robert Kitchen, "Syriac Additions on Anderson: The Garden of Eden in the Book of Steps and Philoxenus of Mabbug," Huggye 6, 1 (2003), http:// syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol6No1/HV6N1Kitchen.html. Some analysis of the influence of Evagrius on the Discourses is found in Harb, "Philoxène à l'égard d'Évagre," 135-55; Paul Harb, "Le Rôle exercé par Philoxène de Mabbūg sur l'evolution de la morale dans l'église syrienne," Parole de l'Orient 1, 1 (1970): 27-48. The following articles by Lemoine should be used with care: Lemoine, "Spiritualité de Philoxène," 351-66; Eugène Lemoine, "Physionomie d'un moine syrien: Philoxène de Mabboug," L'Orient Syrien 3, 1 (1958): 91-102. Finally, it is hoped that Robert Kitchen's forthcoming new translation (Cistercian Studies) in English of the Discourses will revive scholarly interest in these texts. The translations in this chapter from the Discourses are my own with borrowings from those of Budge. All page references will be to the Syriac volume in Budge's text from whence the reader can easily find the page number of Budge's translation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>358</sup> de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 287-89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>359</sup> Several copies from the sixth-century survive, and these works were preserved more than his others in later manuscript copies. See the analysis of the manuscripts in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 281-85. See also the older but still useful table in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 2:xciv-xcv.

<sup>360</sup> See Severus' comments in Severus of Antioch, Select Letters of Severus, 2:1:19, 90. See also the ambivalent comment by Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite in his Chronicle of 507. While Joshua does not hold a high opinion of Philoxenos, he alludes to him as a teacher whose wise was reputed (though ineffective) to be able to dissuade wickedness. Pseudo-Joshua the Sylite, Chronicle, published as The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, trans. J. W. Watt and Frank R. Trombley, TTH 32 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 29, n. 142;

Philoxenos' ascetic instructions followed a set order for building this tower. This progression in the spiritual life was as follows: faith, simplicity, fear of God, poverty, overcoming gluttony, abstinence, and resistance to fornication. The dependency on Evagrius is readily apparent here in that these steps represent the first stage of Evargrius' system, corresponding roughly to the *Praktikos*. Philoxenos' instructions center around how the monk can begin to purify his mind through the fear of God and obedience to the commandments (especially poverty, overcoming gluttony, abstinence, and resistance to fornication).<sup>364</sup> As many have noted, this progression also owes much to the indigenous

Pseudo-Joshua the Sylite, *Chronicle*, published as *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite: Composed in Syriac A.D. 507*, ed. and trans. William Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>362</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:12-16, 316.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>363</sup> See for example Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:5 et passim.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>364</sup> See the summary of these themes by Budge in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 2:lxxiiiff.

Syriac tradition including Aphrahat.<sup>365</sup> In particular, Philoxenos made use of the distinction between the upright (A) and the perfect (A) found in an earlier Syriac works of ascetic theory, such as the *Book of Steps*.<sup>366</sup>

The thirteen discourses can be divided into two sections. The first seven discourses (on faith, simplicity, and fear of God) apply to both the righteous and the perfect. The last six discourses (on poverty, overcoming gluttony, abstinence, and resistance to fornication) are the steps to be taken only by those who have left the world as solitaries to seek perfection. At various steps this ascetic progression overlaps with Philoxenos' Christological polemic, particularly with regard to faith and simplicity, but also in the monk's struggles with gluttony and fornication. In our examination here we will begin with an specific parallels between Philoxenos' polemic and his ascetic *Discourses*, and then conclude with more general observations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>365</sup> Budge included one of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* ("On Faith") as an example of an earlier source in his edition. See Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, clxxv. For a general survey of the state of scholarship on Syrian asceticism see Sidney Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 220-45. Recent bibliography on Syrian asceticism can be found in Nancy Khalek, "Methods of Instructing Syriac-Speaking Christians to Care for the Poor: A Brief Comparison of the Eighth Mēmrā of the Book of Steps and the Story of the Man of God of Edessa," *Hugoye* 8, 1 (2005), http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol8No1/HV8N1Khalek.html.

<sup>366</sup> On the and the and the sock of Steps see the introduction to The Book of Steps, published as The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum, trans. Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, Cistercian Studies 196 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 2004), xxxviii-xliv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>367</sup> In the middle of discourse eight, Philoxenos actually reverses himself and allows that the righteous may also have a place in poverty. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:245.

#### FAITH AND ERROR

Already in the prologue to his *memre*, Philoxenos mentioned the dangers of communion with heretics as one of the passions that must be overcome in this contest of the spirit, alongside other dangers to the ascetic life such as lust, gluttony, and pride. This brief mention was, however, just a passing note concerning what was to come. It is from the first four full *memre* that we can begin to understand why the terminology of Philoxenos' ascetic theology would be so easily employed in his doctrinal polemic. Philoxenos introduced faith and simplicity as the foundational principles for the discipleship of Christ. The role of faith was explained in the second discourse:

For the one who wishes to approach the way of life of the discipleship of Christ in the proper order, it is right that before everything he should hold the true faith in his soul, which believes in God and does not inquire, but affirms his words and does not investigate (ححفت) his nature, and hears his words but does not judge his deeds. For faith makes one believe in God and in everything he says without seeking testimonies and demonstrations of the truth of his word. And this true demonstration suffices for him: that it is God who speaks... The fact that it is God who has spoken and acted is sufficient for the persuasion of our faith. 369

For Philoxenos this emphasis on faith was the first step in the discipleship of Christ. This hermeneutic of direct reception is the basis for Philoxenos' dogmatic approach to Christology. He made this explicit in the same *memra*:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>368</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:13.

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And again the word of faith teaches you concerning the persons, that you should be sure that he who was begotten is not divided, and he who was born is not cut apart. But the father is with his child essentially and [they are] eternally consubstantial with the Holy Spirit. And you only [need] confess that they are. "How" and "from when" or "in what manner" or "up to what point" or "in which form or order"... These things and the like are accepted in faith and without faith one is not able to believe them.<sup>370</sup>

This passage sounds as if it could be taken from the central argument of any of Philoxenos' polemics, but in the context of discourse two, it is merely an excursus in a section whose primary purpose is to describe how the disciple is to receive the spiritual mysteries: "it is faith which makes it possible to receive every word which is spoken (in scripture)." The ascetic context is that of the disciple progressing in knowledge of God.

This ascetic context becomes even more explicit a little later in *memra* four, where Philoxenos pointed out that this ideal monastic state (in which the blasphemous questions of the Arians and dyophysites are absent) is that of Adam and Eve enjoying God's presence in the innocence and simplicity of paradise:

For who is there that does not know how simple was that first union of those at the head of the race of men, and how simple they were with respect to the whole way of life of the world...because the course of the things of the world had not yet been revealed to them; but they drew near divine visions, and face to face God would speak to them continually.... And in the form of a man He would show them everything firsthand, and they never thought in their mind as to where was the dwelling of Him that was showing them [these things]; or from what time He was; or if He had been made, and if He had been made, who made Him; and why He

ארביא בסבלא ליים. אווloxenos of Mabbug, בעל הארניא: מיביא הארניא: מיביא אוווס Philoxenos of Mabbug, Discourses (Budge edition), 1:32.

created us; and for what reason He set us in this Paradise and transmitted this law to us. These things were far from their minds because simplicity does not think of such things, but it is wholly and entirely drawn to the hearing of that which is being said to it, and its whole thought is mingled with the word of him that speaks with it .... just as the child is with the speech of whoever talks to him.<sup>372</sup>

We will address Philoxenos' treatment of simplicity shortly, but to continue our examination of the role of faith, we should note that he conceives of the direct reception of the divine as being the state enjoyed in paradise. Adam and Eve are praised as the Philoxenian ideal of "faith comes by hearing," the Biblical passage (Romans 10:17) which was his continual proof text in his commentaries. It should be noted that Adam and Eve were also, not coincidently, the idealized models for much of the late antique monastic tradition. Indeed the monastic endeavor itself was construed as a return to paradise. <sup>373</sup>

The role of faith, then, was not just to overcome the vagaries of Christological doctrine. Philoxenos went on to champion faith—or more precisely, the "eye of faith"—as the means of direct access to the divine mysteries in discourse three:

The eye of faith does not see in the same way as the eye of the body, but faith compels the vision of the body to see what is invisible to it. For it sees bread, and wine, and oil, and water, but faith compels it to see with its vision spiritually that

<sup>373</sup> On the long tradition of seeing monasticism as a return to paradise, see the commentary and examples in *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, published as *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. Norman Russell, Cistercian Studies 34 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1981), 43-44.

which corporeally is not visible to it, that is to say, instead of bread we eat the body, and instead of wine we drink the blood, and instead of water we see the baptism of the Spirit, and instead of oil the power of Christ....And as the eye [of the body receives] the sun, so also the sight of faith receives the spiritual light of the commandments of Christ. And as with the light of the sun, which makes everything visible, nothing can be seen unless the eye receives it, so also it is with the commandment of God, who is the maker of everything, which is not made certain to us without faith. For the sun is luminous by nature, and the word of God is mighty in its proclamation; but as the natural light of the sun is weakened in blind eyes, and makes nothing visible, so also the commandment of God is considered weak in the soul in which there is no faith.<sup>374</sup>

For Philoxenos, not only was it impossible to have access to God without faith, but even more crucially for the monk, it was impossible to begin to keep the commandments without faith. Accordingly, Philoxenos set faith as the first step in the progress toward spiritual perfection.<sup>375</sup>

Philoxenos' encomium for faith reveals not only a possible origin for the dogmatic aspect of his miaphysite advocacy; it also reveals one motive for his ardent opposition to heresy. Faith, the revealer of mysteries, was not without its rivals in the Philoxenian system.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>375</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:59-60.

In particular, faith labored against error ( ( ). 376 In this choice of antonyms, we gain an interesting insight into how Philoxenos defined faith. In his system, faith was opposed not to unbelief but to erroneous belief. Accordingly, Philoxenos concluded discourse three with this plea for the beginning disciple:

By faith cast away from yourself the garment of error of thoughts which is bound to the things of the world, and which errs and considers that which is not as if it were. Take heed then that you do not change in your faith, remembering at all times the word of Paul, by which you will increase your faith, and cleanse your thoughts from the filth of error, even as he said, "He that would draw near unto God is obligated to believe that God is." 3777

Here we see how Philoxenos contextualized doctrinal error within his ascetic framework. <sup>378</sup> In the Philoxenian ascetic system, error was to be overcome by faith, but this was not the pursuit of right doctrine simply for the sake of Christological accuracy. He urged the monk to overcome error so that he might continue to "draw near unto God," i.e. to make progress on the path to the divine vision.

## SIMPLICITY AND CRAFTINESS

Moving forward in the *Discourses*, we find that Philoxenos paired faith with a second well known virtue, simplicity (**<br/>
hates**). As we have already seen in his scripture

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>376</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:60.

הבשביא בל ביב האמי האמיבה: מו, הכפביא בעביאי. הילובאי. האמיבאי. מו, הכפביא בעביאי. האמיבאי בעביאי. האמיבאי בל ביב האמי האמיבאי מוס האמים באים. האמים באים האמים באים האמים באים ביבאי. מביבאי. מביבאי. מביבאי. מביבאי. מביבאי. מביבאי. האמיבאי האמיבאי האמיבאי און האמיבאי הא

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>378</sup> See also the description of the relationship between faith, error, and the life of the ascetic in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:61-62.

commentaries, faith and simplicity were interrelated in Philoxenos' epistemology. In discourse four, he returned to optic imagery as a way of explaining this relationship:

For it is the custom of faith which is mingled with simplicity ( ( ) that it does not receive doctrine by much persuasion, just as it is not by contrivances or crafty devices ( ) that the healthy and clear eye receives the ray which is sent to it—but immediately as it is opened it looks with strength into the light, because its sight is naturally healthy—so also the eye of faith, which is set in the pupil of simplicity ( ) [sii], as soon as it hears the voice of God, it confesses it, and there rises in it the light of His Word. And joyfully it draws towards Him and receives Him...<sup>379</sup>

As with faith, the ascetic context for Philoxenos' panegyric of simplicity is its capacity as the right state of mind for the reception of divine knowledge. Earlier in discourse four, he described this state of mind with another metaphor:

For simplicity is not that which is understood [as simplicity] in the world, I mean stupidity, but the singleness of mind which...accepts and does not inquire (Lace) like a child receiving words from his nurse.... For as the capacity of the child is too little to investigate human letters, so also is the capacity of our mind too little to be able to understand the explanation (Lace) of the divine mysteries.<sup>380</sup>

This child-like simplicity which Philoxenos urged upon those taking up the discipleship of Christ is the same virtue we have already seen him praise as the appropriate hermeneutic for

בי אונגיא אינגיא האינגיא האינגיא האינגיא האינגיא האינגיא אינגיא אינגיא אינגיא אינגיא אינגיא אינגיא הרבער האינגי הפבל מונה. מנגל מונה בי הוא האינגיא הוא האינגיא אונגיא או

approaching scripture. <sup>381</sup> Indeed, we catch a parallel to his anti-inquiry hermeneutic in this explanation of simplicity in discourse four: "Simplicity received the name befitting to God, for we also call God "simple" in the words of our confession of Him because in him there are no structures, no parts of limbs."

In the ascetic schema of the *Discourses*, however, Philoxenos' aim was not so much to correct mistaken views of God as to apprise the ascetic novice of one more moral and spiritual step in the progression toward the life of perfection. In the proem of discourse five, Philoxenos made clear the moral value of simplicity by modifying again his optic metaphor:

For as the members cannot see without the eye, so neither can virtues be cultivated without simplicity; and as when the eye is blind all the members are in darkness, so also in the absence of simplicity all good things are obstructed. Now simplicity is especially fitting to the system of the solitary. And serenity of thought is fitting to those who have forsaken the world, and who have come outside of it. For where there are none of the forms of the world, the craftiness ( $\checkmark$ ) of the world is unnecessary.<sup>383</sup>

In the Philoxenian system, the ascetic context for simplicity was commandment keeping. Just as faith made it possible to truly hear the commandments, for Philoxenos, simplicity gave one the childlike innocence to obey them.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>381</sup> See chapter three.

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This spiritual virtue was not without opposition, however. Just as Philoxenos set "faith" and "error" in opposition, so also he taught that "simplicity" was opposed in the spiritual contest by "craftiness and cunning" (حمد معرفة المعادم المعادم

For knowledge of the Spirit does not remain in the body which is defeated by sin; for the soul which is guilty of evils is full of cunning (**\( \tau \)**), because cunning itself is the inventor of evils. For the one who desires to toil for [his] lusts runs to become a disciple of cunning, so that with the teaching from it, and with the deceits of iniquity which it shows him he may find means to hide his evil [deeds], and to make an excuse for the hateful things which are wrought by him.<sup>385</sup>

In Philoxenos' view, cunning's threat was twofold. He saw it as cause of sin and as an opponent of spiritual knowledge. He warned that just as simplicity aided one in following the commandments and gaining spiritual knowledge, so craftiness permitted the monk to live in sin, replacing spiritual knowledge with cunning worldly thoughts. <sup>386</sup>

In his ascetic vision of spiritual progress and struggle, cunning also stood as an opposing force to simplicity. To illustrate this he returned to his analogy of a spiritual tower in discourse five:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>384</sup> See the analogy in Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:115.

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<sup>386 &</sup>quot;Craftiness is the teacher of all evils..." .جلسې حقطه جماعت جماعت هم حفظه Philoxenos of Mabbug, Discourses (Budge edition), 1:128.

Craftiness is a strong tower of sin, for when sin has come down on the paths, and plundered every man, it runs to its refuge, craftiness, that it may make an excuse for it to its accusers, and it hides itself in it as in a strong tower from the inquisitors of justice, who have gone forth to track its footsteps. Behold with what evil is thy boasting, O wretched disciple! And [behold] of what you are proud, O wolf who is clothed in a lamb's skin! If craftiness is in you, all iniquity is with you, and if cunning is in your soul all sin dwells in you. If your life consists of the guile of slyness, all wickedness dwells in thee; but your hateful things are not seen outwardly, for craftiness covers them over, for thus is it promised by it to the one who will become its disciple, that it will be a veil for his sin.<sup>387</sup>

Portraying craftiness as a refuge or protection for sin, Philoxenos described it as a fortress standing against the tower of faith from his first discourse.

Having set up a dichotomy between error and cunning on the one hand and faith and simplicity on the other, it is not difficult to see how Philoxenos' polemics against the dyophysites fit into his schema of monastic perfection. Philoxenos found the machinations of craftiness in the blasphemous commentaries and opinions of his theological opponents. Indeed at two points in the *Discourses*, "heretics" as a generic class are specifically condemned due to their cunning. Just as he portrayed cunning in general as wielding a twofold threat—causing sin and obscuring spiritual knowledge, so Philoxenos warned that heresy

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>388</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:113, 157.

would do the same. We have already seen in his polemics how he found confirmation of the former threat in the relaxing of moral canons in the Church of the East under Acacius.<sup>389</sup>

Although he did not neglect the moral threat in his *Discourses*, Philoxenos spent greater energy warning against the threat which cunning posed to spiritual knowledge. In his appeal to the simplicity of Adam and Eve in discourse four, Philoxenos also made an attack upon cunning as a cause of sin and as an intellectual cause of heresy:

Adam and Eve, so long as they stood in natural simplicity...as soon as they heard the command of God, they received it and kept it. For God said to Adam, "Thou shalt not eat; and if you eat, you will die; but if you keep the command I will give you eternal life." And by faith Adam received [the command], and kept [it], and [in] his simplicity he did not judge the command, [saying], "Why has He withheld from us one tree, and given us power over the rest of the others? And He has promised to give me life if I keep the command." Because of his simplicity Adam neither judged ( ) nor inquired into ( ) these things. Now when the counsel of the Enemy came and found simplicity, it taught craft and cunning ( ) council of the Enemy and sowed in that one simple thought, another thought which was its opposite, so that he who was one man, and was wholly and entirely sincere in his simplicity, might be divided into two thoughts... 390

While Philoxenos did not explicitly draw the link between Adam's sin and heresy, he did not need to as the lexical and psychological link made it clear. As we have seen in his polemics, one of Philoxenos' primary criticisms of the dyophysites was what he considered to be their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>389</sup> See chapter three.

inappropriate judging, seeking, and inquiry ( ) into God's commands and God's word.

Philoxenos then continued in the same passage, shifting from speaking of Adam to discussing the effect of cunning upon the mind in general:

So long as they [Adam and Eve] stood in simplicity they obeyed the commandment of God, but as soon as they wished to act craftily they became receivers of the counsel of the Accuser; for cunning is at the side of Satan. Simplicity, then, is with those who belong to Christ. For the man who wishes to be cunning and crafty cannot become a disciple of Christ... For the mind which is full of craftiness is at all times destroying and building up thoughts which are opposed. It binds and looses, it believes and denies, at one time it judges something a thing good, but at another it rejects it and chooses another. For the mind which is trained in craftiness is a channel for confused opinion...<sup>391</sup>

Here we have another glimpse into the psychology of Philoxenos' ascetic system. Just as he encouraged the monk to be simple in the pattern of pre-lapsarian Adam, so Philoxenos described the mind of the cunning (and of the heretic) as divided and confused in the manner of Adam after the fall. The net effect was that Philoxenos set up the heretic, his mind confused by cunning, to be the exact foil for the ideal monk.

The juxtaposition of simple monk and crafty heretic is the primary paranaetic point of the first five *memre* of Philoxenos' *Discourses*. In the conclusion of this section, Philoxenos reviewed his entire argument to explain that becoming a disciple of Christ meant serving Christ alone and not teachers of other doctrines.

عدى كن تدويبه منديم مهه، لعميد مناه، لا تسته كه حدى من توليد الاهمام تراه المستعادي ا

And as an [earthly] child knows only one master, the fear of whom rules him, and at whose command he trembles, and of whose rod alone he is afraid, and who does not know even of the existence of other masters, so also with the child of faith doth the fear of the mastership of Christ alone rule his life, and other teachers of doctrines are accounted nothing by him.... And if any other teacher wishes to give him another doctrine besides that which he holds, he does not receive it; for his youth is natural sincerity, and not the destructive error of opinions.<sup>392</sup>

## WAR WITH SATAN AND FORNICATION OF THE SPIRIT

In Philoxenos' discussion of craftiness, we catch a glimpse of demonological vocabulary similar to that found in his polemics. In discourse five, he described the fate of a monk who has been corrupted from his simplicity by craftiness. He made this charge against those he considered to be blasphemous corruptors of monks:

...although he be leading a life of stillness he will reject this, and will honor and choose speech rather than stillness, and craftiness rather than his earlier simplicity, and cunning rather than his ignorance, and from being a sweet-tempered and peaceful man, you will make him into a furious and wrathful man.<sup>393</sup>

Recalling Philoxenos' polemical descriptions of the dyophysites, it is easy to see how he constructed the confused mind of the heretic as one type of those beguiled by cunning. In Philoxenos' judgment, this "furious and wrathful man" had crossed over to the side of cunning and the cunning one, Satan. Philoxenos had already laid out this adversarial relationship earlier in discourse five:

 $<sup>^{392}</sup>$  غرا سابه موه به به به ماه ماه ماه مهاسه مهاسه مهاسه برم مهاسه مهره ماه مهره معلى معرف من مع

The ornamentation of the head, which belongs to the wanton and dissolute, is not fitting for us, neither is deceit, which is the first invention of the Enemy. For craftiness is the property of the Accuser and of all his ministers, and simplicity is the riches of Christ and of all His disciples. Cunning is only useful in the business of the world, and to those who have set themselves to spoil and plunder others, and for the oppression and defrauding of those akin to them; to them [alone] is slyness necessary.<sup>394</sup>

With this construction, Philoxenos added a further layer to his binary pitting crafty heretics against simple monks. In this vision, each was serving an ultimate master. For Philoxenos, the crafty heretic was a "minister" of the "Enemy" and "Calumniator" whose intellectual ornamentation was not merely misguided but actively set on spoiling and plundering the disciples of Christ.

Such language of spiritual combat with demons had long been a fixture of ascetic literature, so it should not surprise us to see it in the first section of Philoxenos' discourses. In the second half of the *Discourses*—the section reserved for the perfect—Philoxenos amplified his rhetoric of spiritual warfare and also made a very intriguing analogy. Philoxenos began his call to war in the ninth discourse:

Let the going forth of Christ our Lord into the wilderness be an excellent example to us of the doctrine of poverty, and in that same type in which He departed from dwelling with the children of men to the conflict with the power which was opposed to Him, let us also depart from the world in the battle which is against Satan. Let us take out with us from the world nothing, except our spiritual armor, which is not of the world. Now Jesus went forth immediately after baptism, and He left the world

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>395</sup> See Brakke's work for the pre-history of spiritual combat. Brakke, *Demons*, 10-14.

and all that is in it, and the dwelling with mankind, and everything that is in it, and went forth by Himself in His own strength to do battle with the Accuser.<sup>396</sup>

This imagery was repeated in the same discourse twice more.<sup>397</sup> The next instance made it clear that this spiritual combat included battle with heretics: "And observe also the freedom in which Jesus went forth, and do thou thyself also go forth like Him.... Go forth with Him to the battle against the powers of error...." In light of these passages, we may conclude that although Philoxenos' most elaborate efforts to connect the struggle against heresy with combat against Satan are in the earlier section of the *Discourses*, this struggle is assumed to continue in the later discourses, though it is less accented.

There is evidence of this assumption in the penultimate discourse, number twelve, where we find a brief passage that subdivides the vice of fornication into a hierarchy. The allusion to heresy is unexpected and brief, but also reveals the importance which Philoxenos assigned resisting heresy in his ascetic system. Moreover, in it we find the same logical razor about communion with heretics as we have seen in his polemicals derived from 2

Corinthians 6:14-16:<sup>399</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>397</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:275 and 311.

ער, שבע שורה דופת כה שמב. במשם בארש שורה באר המפם בארש שורה באר המפר שורה אווסבר שורה אווסבר שלה אווסבר באר Philoxenos of Mabbug, Discourses (Budge edition), 1:275.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>399</sup> Μὴ γίνεσθε έτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις· τίς γὰρ μετοχὴ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνομία, ἢ τίς κοινωνία φωτὶ πρὸς σκότος; τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Χριστοῦ πρὸς Βελιάρ, ἢ τίς μερὶς πιστῷ μετὰ ἀπίστου; τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῷ θεοῦ μετὰ

Now there is a distinction even in fornication: there is the fornication of the body, and the fornication of the soul, and the fornication of the spirit .... The fornication of the body is the adulterous act which takes place outside the law with a strange woman; and the fornication of the soul is when the thoughts thereof have intercourse secretly with the lust of fornication, even though the act is not performed outwardly; and the fornication of the spirit is when the soul has intercourse ( \(\mathbb{CD}\)) with devils, or when it receives agreement with strange doctrines.

The association of heresy with fornication here, though it is not developed elsewhere in the *Discourses*, is of the highest rhetorical strength. Philoxenos placed fornication last in the *Discourses* as the final and most difficult obstacle for the monk to overcome on his path to perfection. And in describing fornication, he placed "fornication of the spirit," i.e. heresy, as the pinnacle of fornication to be overcome. If the Philoxenian monk was to succeed in his path to perfection and his combat with devils, he had to overcome the fornication of the spirit with the strange doctrines of heresy.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the demonic contortions of the crafty mind of the heretic to the nearly perfect monk fighting against the "fornication of the spirit," Philoxenos dramatically wove fighting heresy into the general struggles of his ascetic *Discourses*. In his polemics, he used the language of spiritual combat to heighten the distinction between the different claimants of

είδώλων; ήμεῖς γὰο ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεοιπατήσω καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν θεὸς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονταί μου λαός (NA27).

Orthodoxy and to reveal what he considered to be the ultimate stakes in the battle over Christology. Clearly, this usage was a microcosm of his ascetic epistemology. In the *Discourses*, he presented the fight against heresy as one facet of the monk's struggle against Satan to obey the commandments, purify his heart, and gain spiritual knowledge. For Philoxenos, spiritual knowledge was gained only after heresy had been overcome.

I exhort you also to be open defenders and preachers of the truth. Be not afraid of man; do not desist from fighting zealously for the truth, saying: "We are solicitous for the quiet of our ascetic life." The ascetic life is beautiful, and works of justice are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>401</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Discourses (Budge edition)*, 1:12-18, 316.

worthy of praise, (but) these are members whose head is truth, and if the head is cut off, the members perish. 402

لمه مدن محمد ماهد محمد من معنی منافعه من محمد ماهد من معنی معنی منافعه من محمد ماهد من معنی منافعه المنافعه المنافعه منافعه المنافع المناف

# CONCLUSION ASCETICISM, HERESY, AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

....some of them turned aside toward falsehood out of premeditation, and some of them on account of bodily affections, and others because they were [already] heretics, and others because they were troubled, and again others because the fear of God was contemptible in their eyes, and others from ignorance, and again others because they sought to please, and others because it did not concern them if error should seize the Church instead of faith...and while the reasons vary why those monks were numbered with the heretics, they are gathered under one head: ...they have held the truth to be falsehood, just as was said about similar ones by the Apostle, "They held wickedness as truth" and again "Because they did not try to obtain the knowledge ( of God, he handed them over to the knowledge ( of abomination."

—Letter to the Monks of Senun

Writing from exile, Philoxenos sought to explain to the monks of Senun why so many of their brethren from other monasteries of Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine had changed sides and abandoned the miaphysite creed when it fortunes fell in 519. His explanation reveals the lens through which he viewed the Christological controversies. Of the many reasons he listed as to why monks might join those they had previously considered heretics, doctrinal agreement was only one among many. In addition to indifference to doctrine, Philoxenos mentioned a variety of reasons which he classified as failure in ascesis

בה כבונה אין כבי האביה בל המולא בל האביה כבי האביה בל המולא בל במולא בל המולא בל במולא במולא בל במולא ביא בל במולא בל במולא בל במולא בל במולא במולא בל במולא בל במולא ביא בל במולא בל במולא בל במולא בל במולא בל במולא במולא בל במולא ביא בל במולא במולא בל במולא במולא בל במולא במולא

(such as giving into bodily affections, despising the fear of God, or seeking to please others). In relation to all of these practical explanations of why the monks would change their Christological position, Philoxenos gave pride of place to one reason: "they did not try to obtain the knowledge of God."

His causal explanation of heretical affiliation reveals several key themes of this study. First, the monastic milieu which was the focus of Philoxenos' writings is readily apparent. Moreover, the many reasons which Philoxenos listed underscore how he viewed the doctrinal conflicts within a context of practice. Finally, the "chief reason" which Philoxenos developed sums up nicely the system of spiritual knowledge which he had formed from the works of Evagrius. Philoxenos understood the Christological controversies as part of the struggle toward divine knowledge. He viewed God as working, through the *oikonomia* of the incarnation, to bring humanity into divine knowledge. This plan, however, faced spiritual opposition from Christological heresy. The demonic forces behind heresy stood as barriers to divine knowledge.

With this spiritual dichotomy as his paradigm, Philoxenos subsumed his fight against heresy within the spiritual contest of asceticism. In the end, both were struggles to pursue the knowledge of God. As we have seen, however, this knowledge of God was not solely a matter of doctrinal theology. It was arrived at through a variety of practices including contemplation, scripture reading, the liturgical mysteries, and ascetic discipline. Theological

How The word used here " is not a common term in Philoxenos' writings. While Brockelmann listed its primary definition as "cognitio," we should note that in this particular context there is probably also a credal overtone to Philoxenos' usage as well, evoking the term, " is not a common term in Philoxenos' writings. While Brockelmann is probably also a credal overtone to Philoxenos' usage as well, evoking the term, " is not a common term in Philoxenos' writings. While Brockelmann is probably also a credal overtone to Philoxenos' usage as well, evoking the term, " is not a common term in Philoxenos' writings. While Brockelmann listed its primary definition as "cognitio," we should note that in this particular context there is probably also a credal overtone to Philoxenos' usage as well, evoking the term, " is not a common term in Philoxenos' writings.

reflection was only one among many intertwined religious practices in late antique Christianity. Moreover, for Philoxenos, forms of praxis also served as guards against errant theology. In short, to understand the full weight of Philoxenos' struggle for orthodoxy one must look to his vision of orthopraxy.

# A RESOLUTION TO CHRISTOLOGICAL CONFLICT?

Having demonstrated that the Christological disagreements of late antique Syria were more than merely semantic, umerical, or doctrinal disagreements over Christ's nature(s), the depth of the division comes into focus. These conflicts represented epistemic clashes between competing paradigms of religious knowledge and practice. Even had the Emperor Zeno or anyone else succeeded in resolving the specific doctrinal agreements, the sources of conflict would have remained. Like a monk agitated by the world, religious sensibilities built on traditions of practice were easily disturbed.

In fact, it would be possible to write a history of the Christological controversies in terms of conflicting notions of paying the right reverence to God. We have seen how the charge of irreverence was one of Philoxenos' most ready weapons in his polemic. Ironically, this was also one of the most common charges made against him by his opponents!<sup>405</sup> Given that a paradox lay at the core of the Christian narrative, it is not surprising that sensibilities would be offended as different interpretations were proposed. What is interesting to note, however, is both the diversity and the assumed uniformity of these sensibilities. While

 $<sup>^{405}</sup>$  For a brief example of this criticism being leveled against Philoxenos, see Habib, *Tractatus*, §11, 42, or 45.

Philoxenos was conscious that the practices he appealed to were at times problematic (most notably the *Trisagion*), he nevertheless assumed that he could call upon forms of Christian practice as if they were universally accepted.

It is tempting to see such appeals as pragmatic rhetoric on Philoxenos' part.

Similarly, one might note how conveniently his rhetoric of spiritual struggle lent itself to "demonization" of his opponents. This interpretation is ultimately too facile, however. While his appeal to practice and ascesis was intentionally hyperbolic and his use of demonology purposefully confrontational, Philoxenos did not create such polemical arguments *ex nihilo*. His intuitive use of practice and his schema of spiritual struggle were the products of more than two centuries of ecclesiastical standardization and theological conflict. If competing sensibilities and epistemes ignited the dispute over Christology, it was established traditions for pursuing ascesis and opposing heresy that kept the conflict burning.

#### ORTHODOXY AND ASCESIS

In her analysis of ascetic discourse, Averil Cameron has noted how the systematization of asceticism and heresiology "ran parallel" in late antique Christianity. 406 Specifically, Cameron points to a period of "ascetic closure," a narrowing and transformation of ascetic discourse into the orthodoxy of the Byzantine state. 407 The

<sup>406</sup> Averil Cameron, "Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity," in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157. Cameron derives this concept from the related studies of Brown and Markus. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>407</sup> Cameron elaborates, "Heretics and secularists...are the state's demons and heresiology the state's ascetic discourse." Cameron, "Ascetic Closure," 158.

relationship between ascesis and orthodoxy in Philoxenos' polemics fits this observation quite well. Philoxenos framed questions of orthodoxy in terms of ascesis, and his polemics should be seen as leading toward the subsequent development Cameron identifies.

We should not, however, let the later dénouement of doctrinal orthodoxy eclipse the fact that Philoxenos stands at an earlier stage. He did seek to defend orthodoxy, but he did not view it purely as a doctrinal matter. His concern was with knowledge of God broadly understood. His system of religious *gnosis*, derived from Evagrius, placed the locus of this knowledge in ascetic contemplation and the liturgical mysteries. In appealing to this system of spiritual knowledge, Philoxenos purposefully repudiated theological discourse even as he engaged in it.

To play with the Evagrian terminology, we may say that for Philoxenos, "practice" led to "theory." Or more precisely, he thought that correct ascetic practice led one to the correct spiritual state to receive knowledge of God. The inverse was also true: without correct ascetic practice and the requisite stillness and reverence, one could not arrive at right doctrine. This axiom was Philoxenos' main weapon in the Christological controversies. By attacking his opponents' theological method and practice as incompatible with his Evagrian ascetic system, he could discredit their theology without having to engage in the sort of doctrinal discourse he had repudiated as the cause of heresy.

Ultimately, however, Philoxenos' rejection of systematic or speculative theology did not carry the day, even within miaphysite circles. Given the trends of ascetic narrowing and doctrinal systematization, his broad synthesis of orthodoxy within orthopraxy was rapidly lost in subsequent Christological controversy. When miaphysite monks began to excerpt

Philoxenos for polemical use in the late sixth century, they treated him as a "doctor" and theologian, ironically re-crafting his works to make them more amenable to scholastic disputation. For example, the scribes who composed the catena manuscript BL Add. 17201 (paleographically dated to the sixth or seventh century) placed Philoxenos alongside Didymus the Blind and Cyril of Alexandria as a ready source against heretics. <sup>408</sup> These scribes even went as far as to excerpt Philoxenos' works in a fashion that directly imitated Cyril's. In structuring the manuscript, they followed the *Twelve Chapters* and a *Confession of Faith* of Cyril with a *Confession of Faith of Philoxenos* and *Twelve Chapters of Philoxenos*. These *Twelve Chapters of Philoxenos* are also to be found in the catena manuscript written by the monks of St. John of Nairab in 569. <sup>409</sup> It is likely that these monks or their contemporaries created the twelve chapters by combing through the works of Philoxenos and adapting citations to serve the more speculative doctrinal debates which followed the Second Council

<sup>408</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, Confession of Philoxenos (BL Add. 17201), in MS BL Add. 17201, fol. 6r-v; Philoxenos of Mabbug, Twelve Chapters of Philoxenos (version b), in MS BL Add. 17201, fols. 14r-15v. Unfortunately, both of the works attributed to Philoxenos in this manuscript have lost folia, and only the first 15 folia of the manuscript are extant. Nevertheless, the structure is clear. The manuscript, as extant, begins with chapters of Didymus the Blind, then proceeds with the Twelve Chapters of Cyril, a Confession of Faith of Cyril, a Confession of Faith of Philoxenos, a partially preserved and unidentified theological treatise, and then concludes with the Twelve Chapters of Philoxenos. See the description in de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie, 184-85; Wright, Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, 690, Item DCCXLIX. A similar confession from an unnumbered manuscript from Tur Abdin is edited in Philoxenos of Mabbug, Confession of Philoxenos (Mor Gabriel MS), in The Christological Thought of Philoxenos of Mabbug in Reaction to the Council of Chalcedon, ed. and trans. Edip Aydin (London: Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Heythrop College, University of London, 1995), 11-13.

<sup>409</sup> Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Twelve Chapters of Philoxenos (version a)*, in MS BL Add. 14597, 91r-98v. See the description in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 183-84; Wright, *Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 648b-651a.

of Constantinople (553), the first of the ecumenical councils to be occupied solely with doctrinal issues.<sup>410</sup>

At the same time as Philoxenos' legacy as a polemicist was detached from its ascetic context and flattened into that of a church doctor, his ascetic works remained quite popular in their own right. It was his *Discourses* and not his theological works which continued to circulate as integral texts rather than in florilegia. In the Syriac manuscript collections, numerous copies of the *Discourses* survive to the present, while the Philoxenian New Testament has completely disappeared and his biblical commentaries survive in only a few very early manuscripts. <sup>411</sup> In short, his ascetic works also became estranged from his Christological polemics. Indeed, a Greek version of Philoxenos' *Letter to Patricius* circulated centuries later among Greek Chalcedonian monasteries under the name of Isaac of Nineveh. <sup>412</sup>

This later uncoupling of Philoxenos' theological polemics and his ascetic treatises should be understood as part of the "closing of possibilities...[and] narrowing of the

<sup>410</sup> De Halleux suggests that this work is not original to Philoxenos. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabhog: Sa vie*, 184. It should be noted that other works by Philoxenos in the manuscript, such as the *Letter to the Monks of Senun* or *Against Those Who Divide Our Lord* seem to have been preserved intact. The Second Council of Constantinople did not issue canons or address matters of ecclesiastical administration. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>411</sup> See the discussion of the manuscript traditions in chapters three and five.

<sup>412</sup> The Greek translation was made from the an abbreviated Syriac version of the letter which circulated with the works of Isaac. Philoxenos of Mabbug, *Letter to Patricius (Shorter Recension)*, in MS Vat. syr. 125, fols. 145r-158r. This manuscript has now been edited and made available as part of *Syriac Manuscripts from the Vatican Library: Volume 1*, DVD-ROM (Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana and Brigham Young University, 2005). See the discussion of the manuscript and translation history in de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: Sa vie*, 255.

horizons of society at large" inherent in the "ascetic closure" of late antiquity. 413 As orthodoxy began to assume a separate but inherited discourse from asceticism, the Philoxenian understanding of orthopraxy lost its cultural currency.

This study has sought to retrieve Philoxenos' involvement in the Christological controversies from behind the distorting legacy of his later reception. In his late antique and Syrian contexts, Philoxenos was on the verge of—but did not fully know—the coming era of systematized doctrine. Thus, when viewed on his own terms and not through the lens of the later trajectory of Christianity, it is apparent that for Philoxenos doctrinal conflicts were not solely matters of formulae and anathemas. They were matters of ascesis and practice. Therein lay the path he advocated to true knowledge of God:

It is impossible for it to be attained by research, nor by discussion, nor probing, nor controversy. But if one should increase in virtue; and proceed to faith, righteousness, the confession of the divine words, and the keeping of the holy commandments; and reach the level of [spiritual] adulthood..., [then] to such a one the wisdom of the Spirit is revealed—this is not so that one may put it into words, for that is not possible, but only so that one may see it; perceive it; and be perfected by it. 414

<sup>413</sup> Cameron, "Ascetic Closure," 147.

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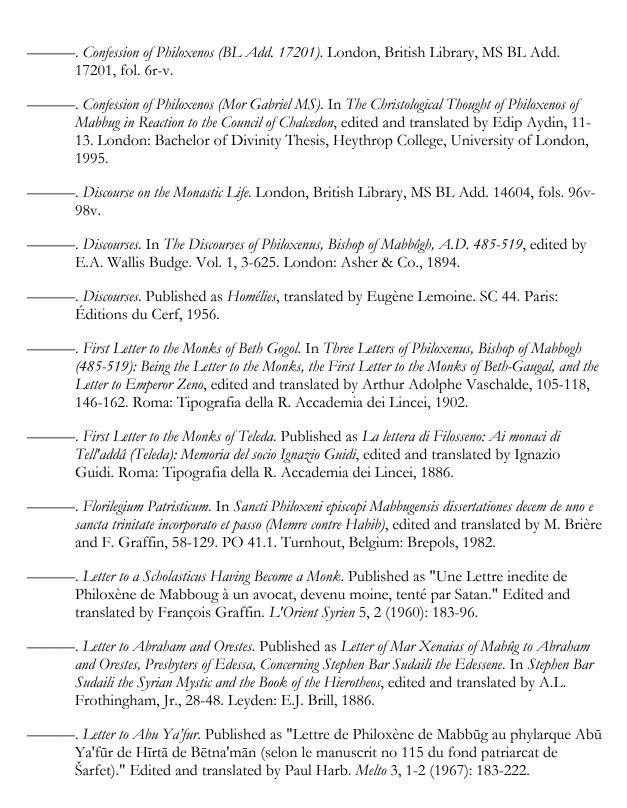
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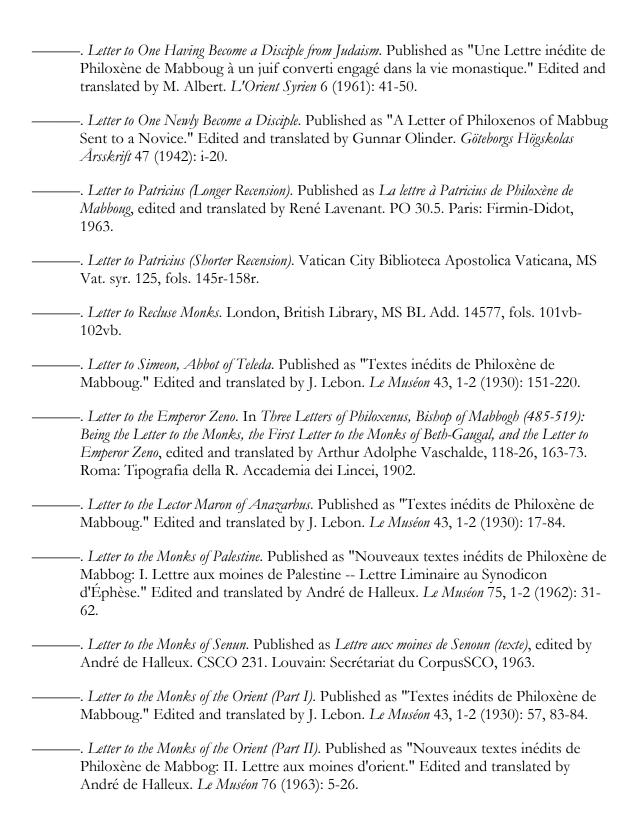
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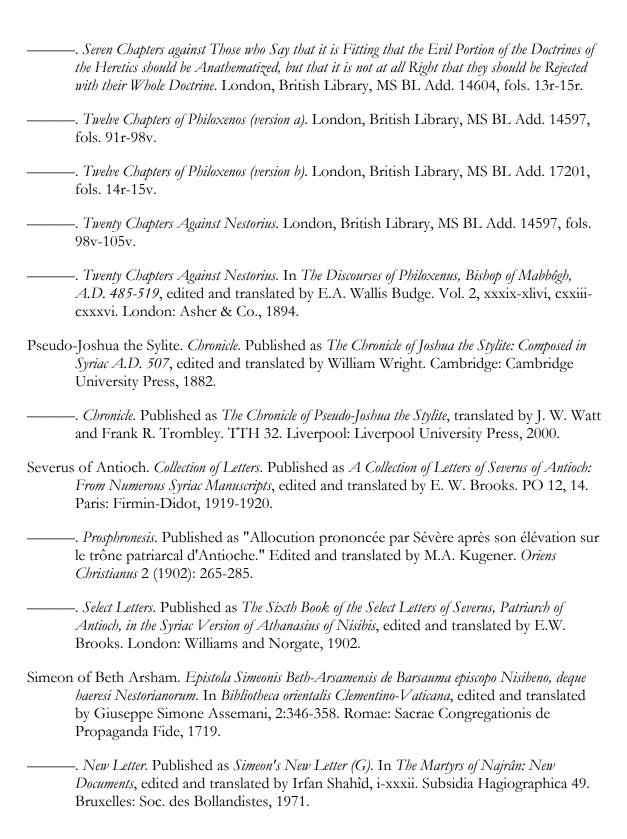
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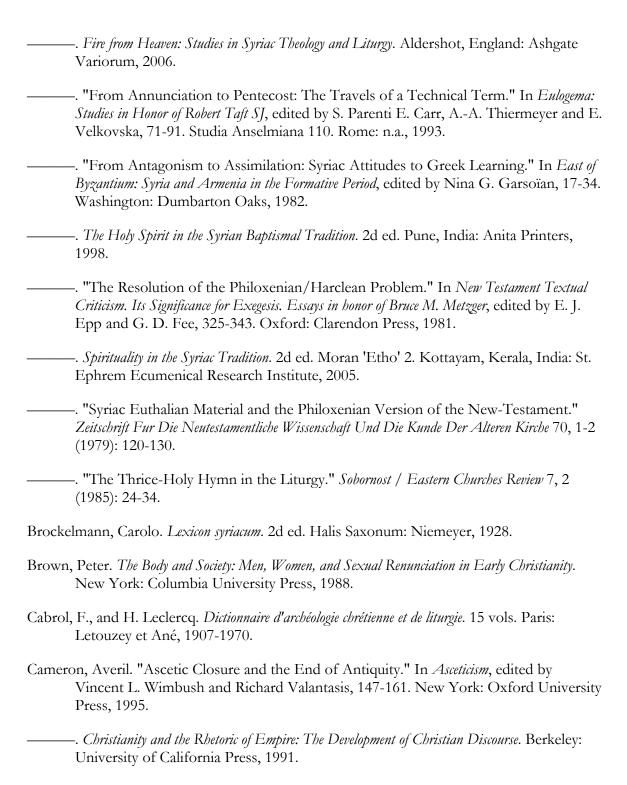




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